



**MALMÖ
UNIVERSITY**

Faculty for Education and Society

Department of Sport Sciences

Two-Year Master´s Thesis,

IV610G, Spring 2024

30 credits

**Navigating Change: A Qualitative Research
Inquiry into Body Image Perceptions of
Dedicated CrossFit Athletes in Pregnancy**

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Master Exam 120 credits

Sport Sciences

Date for the Final Seminar: 29-5-2024

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Abstract

This thesis presents a qualitative study of the pregnancy experiences of dedicated CrossFit athletes in Denmark, aiming to understand how pregnancy affects their body image. Utilizing a qualitative research design, the research attempts to understand the dynamics of the athletic journey in the midst of the dramatic physiological and psychological changes involved in pregnancy. Using online surveys and systematic thematic analysis, the results provide rich insights into their various experiences, challenges, and strategies for coping. Ethical considerations are critical at every stage of the research process, with detailed attention being paid to informed consent, confidentiality and participant autonomy. Apart from ethical matters, the study is driven by an interest in the social dynamics of the CrossFit community, a refusal to accept stereotypes and advocacy for gender equity in sports. The research seeks to empower female athletes with voices and debunk the myths linked to pregnancy and athleticism and thereby, create a more supportive, inclusive environment within the CrossFit community. The scientific rigor is maintained by a strong data collection that includes simple survey instructions and solid thematic analysis techniques. Although the study has limitations in the form of common reliance on self-reported data, and the possible biases of the researcher, it attempts to address these by reflexivity, validation checks, and reporting transparency. On the whole, the thesis offers an important contribution to the area of pregnancy experiences in sports, providing a complex view of the relationship between athleticism, pregnancy, and body image representations. Through the focus on the reality of individuals who are engaged in CrossFit, the research points out the necessity of further investigations and enhancement of this field, which has ramifications for both the athletic performance and overall well-being.

Keywords: Body Image; Pregnancy; CrossFit; Body Image Expectations; Coping Mechanisms; Social Comparison; Athletes; Physical Activity; Social Support

Preface

Being a part of the sports world, the exploration of the issue of body image perception among female athletes hits home. As I was exploring different sports myself, I found myself in love with strength training as it unites physical power and mental strength in one. However, the all-penetrating judgment and criticism that is associated with women in strength sports were something that could not be disregarded in the midst of the joy of testing the limits of the body and forming a stronger and more resilient self. Social media became a battlefield whereby women's bodies, especially the ones which are muscular or unconventional, were attacked and laughed at upon. Seeing the damage that such brutal remarks caused to numerous women, friends and fellow sportswomen included, was discouraging and deeply disturbing. It was clear that the pressure to adhere to narrow beauty standards and the constant examination of women's bodies, strong and muscular ones in particular, could result in severe mental health problems, like body image problems and eating disorders. Observing gifted athletes resign themselves from their love for sports because of the load of criticism and self-pity was painful. Faced with this background of constant body shaming, and its impact on the mental health of women, the research began. The choice to investigate the complex relationship between body image perceptions, athleticism, and mental health was motivated by the need to comprehend and deal with the underlying reasons of this widespread problem. Highlighting the lived experiences of dedicated female athletes, especially at significant life transitions like pregnancy, might reveal invaluable information for interventions and supportive systems. There is one specific incident that remains the driving force behind this research journey. It was at a CrossFit competition that I saw a pregnant athlete without a sign of fear stepping onto the competition floor with her growing belly showing her power and resilience. However, in the midst of the cheering and clapping, I could not get rid of the fact that she was now under more scrutiny and judgment for going against the norm. It was this poignant moment that inspired me to investigate the experiences of pregnant, dedicated CrossFit athletes and to unveil the intricacies of body image perceptions among this specific group. My intention with this research, to be able to add to a more global debate about women's health, empowerment and inclusivity in sports. At the end of it all, I strive to create

a conducive environment where female athletes can freely do whatever they feel like doing without the fear of criticism or bias, and in the process, we all win.

Table of Contents

Abstract	2
Preface	3
Table of Contents	5
1. Introduction	9
2. Aim and Research Questions	12
2.1 Specific Research Objectives	12
2.2 Research Questions and Sub-questions	13
2.2.1 Main Research Question.....	13
2.2.2. Sub-questions	14
2.2.3 Rationale for Research Questions and Linkage to Research Aim.....	14
2.3 Clarification of Terms	15
2.3.1 Body Image: A Multidimensional Construct	15
2.3.2 Body Image Expectations: Anticipated Perceptions	15
2.3.3 Pregnancy: A Transformative Period	15
2.3.4 CrossFit: High-Intensity Functional Training	16
2.3.5 Social Comparison: Evaluative Processes.....	16
2.3.6 Dedicated CrossFit Athletes: Distinguishing Factors	16
3. Previous Research	18
3.1 Body Image Perceptions	18
3.2 Psychological Adaptation	19
3.3 Exercise Effects on Body Image	20
3.4 CrossFit Community and Body Image	21

3.5 Copying Strategies and Social Support	21
3.6 Research Gap.....	22
4. Theoretical Perspectives.....	24
4.1 Social Comparison Theory	24
4.2 Coping Theory (Transactional Model of Stress and Coping).....	25
4.3 Rationale for Theory Choice	27
5. Methodology.....	29
5.1 Introduction	29
5.2 Research Design	29
5.3 Data Collection	30
5.3.1 Data Collection Instruments - Online Qualitative Survey	30
5.4 Participants	32
5.5 Recruitment	32
5.5.1 Minimizing Coercion	33
5.6 Pilot Testing	33
5.7 Data Analysis	34
5.8 Validity and Reliability	36
6. Findings	38
6.1 Introduction	38
6.2 Pre-Pregnancy Body Image.....	40
6.2.1 Pre-Pregnancy Body Image Perspectives	40
6.2.2 Influence of Comparison.....	43
6.3 Anticipation vs. Reality	44
6.3.1 The Influence of CrossFit on Body Image in Pregnancy	44
6.3.2 Physical and Emotional Impact of Pregnancy on Body Image	45

6.3.3 Influence of Comparison in Pregnancy	46
6.3.4 Key Moments and Phases During Pregnancy	47
6.4 Copying Mechanisms	48
6.5 Factors Influencing Experience	52
6.5.1 Aligning Pregnancy Expectations.....	52
6.5.2 Finding Positivity Amidst Body Image Changes	53
6.5.3 Varied Perspectives on Body Image Changes	54
6.5.4 Navigating Body Image Changes with Resilience and Compassion...	55
6.5 Summary	56
7. Discussion of Ethical, Scientific and Social Considerations.....	59
7.1 Ethical Considerations.....	59
7.2 Social Considerations	61
7.3 Scientific Considerations	62
7.3.1 Survey Responses Evaluation.....	63
7.3.2 Refinement of Research Aim and Main Question.....	65
8. Limitations.....	67
9. Future Research	70
10. Practical Implications.....	71
11. Conclusion	73
References	74
Appendix.....	81
Appendix A1 Online Survey Guide	81
A1.1 Online Survey Questions	81
A1.2 Consent Form	83

A1.3 Qualitative Survey Invitations	84
A1.3.1 Instagram Message Invitations	84
A1.3.2 Facebook Group Invitations	85

List of Tables

Table 1: Evaluation of Theoretical Frameworks - Strengths and Limitations.....	28
Table 2: Body Image Expectations and Experiences Among Dedicated CrossFit Athletes Before and During Pregnancy	39

1. Introduction

Body image as a complex construct that combines perceptions, attitudes, and feelings towards one's own body is relevant in various contexts (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Tiggemann, 2011; Al-Mutawtah et al., 2023). In athletes, this relationship goes far beyond the physical and affects performance, identity, and general health (Prewitt-White et al., 2018). Pregnancy being a transformative process that is associated with substantial physiological and psychological alterations makes body image more relevant (Borodulin et al., 2008). In this time of transition, the phenomenon of the female CrossFit athletes becomes a unique but neglected field of academic discourse. The purpose of this study is to explore how pregnancy impacts the body image of dedicated female CrossFit athletes in Denmark. Pregnancy is a significant change, which transforms a woman's body, self-image, and identity (Linde et al., 2022; Borodulin et al., 2008). This universal transformation, however, acquires a special color when it comes to female athletes, especially those who are devoted to the world of CrossFit. The rigorous training, focus on strength and community-oriented nature of CrossFit add new layers to the connection between body image and the experience of pregnancy (Prewitt-White et al., 2018). Unraveling the processes through which female CrossFit athletes cope with this transformation is crucial in addressing the larger conversation regarding women's health, athletic performance, and the incorporation of pregnancy into an athlete's journey. CrossFit is known for its tough workouts and strong community spirit, creating a special setting for the exploration of body image during pregnancy. The spirit of community and common dedication to bodily perfection provides the context in which body image expectations and experiences tend to be strongly affected. This study recognizes and appreciates the particularity of CrossFit as a context for examining how pregnancy meets the athletic identity of dedicated female CrossFit participants.

Earlier research has provided information on different areas concerning body image, exercise patterns, social support, and psychological well-being in both athletes and pregnant women (Al-Mutawtah et al., 2023; Guardino & Dunkel Schetter, 2013; Rodgers et al., 2024; Borodulin et al., 2008). An example is provided in Zaccagni and Gualdi-Russo (2023) where a comprehensive study on the effects of participating in sports on body image perception and

ideals is given, thus, demonstrating the complicated interaction among physical activity, self-perception, and psychological health. In the same way, body image was highlighted as a global mental health issue by Rodgers et al. (2023) focusing on its importance for the psychological well-being of athletes. Furthermore, research by Whiteman-Sandland et al. (2016) and White et al. (2006) has examined the impact of social support and community dynamics on exercise adherence, which could offer some information on the influence of supportive social dynamics within fitness communities such as CrossFit. Swami, Steadman, and Tovée (2009) focused on body size ideals and dissatisfaction among female athletes, providing an important aspect of the influence of sport activities on body image perceptions, which is quite useful for pregnant athletes who are undergoing bodily changes. However, despite the extensive literature on body image in athletes and pregnant women, there remains a dearth of studies specifically examining how pregnancy impacts the body image of dedicated female CrossFit athletes. This study addresses a gap in the existing literature by focusing specifically on the intersection of body image, pregnancy and the unique demands of CrossFit training among dedicated female athletes. This study seeks to provide useful thoughts to the fields of sports psychology, women's health, and athletic performance by examining body image expectations and experiences in the CrossFit and pregnancy settings. Also, by narrowing the focus to CrossFit athletes, this study is concerned with an area in sports science that is a niche, providing insights into the lived experiences and challenges of a particular group.

Generally, this introduction serves to orient the reader to the complex terrain of body image expectations and experiences in pregnancy in dedicated CrossFit athletes. This particular research area provides readers with important information of the pregnancy and athletic identity and performance, which is used to enhance the general knowledge of the health and well-being of women in sports. Therefore, this study sets a precisely defined and important research problem that discusses the intersection of body image, pregnancy, and athletic performance in the context of CrossFit. The goal is not just to add to academic knowledge, but also to practical understanding and support systems that women encounter when they are faced with the life-changing experience of both CrossFit and pregnancy. To achieve this aim, this study employs a qualitative research methodology, utilizing online qualitative surveys as the primary data collection method. Participants were recruited from online CrossFit

communities and social media platforms, and they were invited to complete open-ended survey questions regarding their experiences of body image during pregnancy within the CrossFit context. The survey responses were coded using systematic thematic analysis, which is a detailed approach to recognize and interpret patterns and themes within qualitative data. This approach enabled the comprehensive study of the lived experiences, battles, and coping mechanisms of pregnant CrossFit athletes in terms of body image.

Now, let's pose an intriguing question: How do CrossFit's unique demands meet the transformational journey of pregnancy for dedicated female athletes? This introduction serves as a short compass directing the way. The exploration focuses on the body image and lived experiences of dedicated CrossFit athletes pre- and during pregnancy. Subsequent chapters elaborate on the research methodology, theoretical frameworks, and data analysis methods, providing detailed knowledge of the body image processes related to CrossFit and pregnancy.

2. Aim and Research Questions

This chapter describes the research objective, specifying the ultimate purpose and targeted outcomes of the investigation. The aim of this study is to explore how pregnancy impacts the body image of dedicated female CrossFit athletes in Denmark. This research provides a nuanced understanding of how these athletes perceive and experience changes in their body image during and surrounding pregnancy within the context of their CrossFit engagement. Through an in-depth examination of the intricate relationship between pregnancy and body image perceptions, the study seeks to address the knowledge gap in the academic literature regarding the changes in body image that dedicated CrossFit athletes experience during pregnancy.

2.1 Specific Research Objectives

The research aim is subdivided into specific objectives to facilitate a comprehensive investigation:

a) To Assess Pre-Pregnancy Body Image Expectations: The first specific objective is to investigate the pre-pregnancy body image expectations of dedicated female CrossFit athletes. This encompasses the perception that these athletes held when it comes to their body image and fitness level and performance as athletes before the pregnancy process.

b) To Examine Evolving Body Image Expectations During Pregnancy: The second specific objective is to explore and compare the alterations of body image expectations of pregnant CrossFit athletes throughout their pregnancy. This includes an examination of transformations in features such as looks, health, and sports accomplishment, presenting an image of the flux nature of body image perceptions at this period.

c) To Analyze the Influence of Pregnancy Experiences on Body Image Perception: The third detailed goal is to observe the impact of pregnancy experiences, considering physical, emotional and psychological changes, on body image perceptions of committed CrossFit athletes. This aim seeks to reveal the diverse ways in which pregnancy-related factors influence the body image experiences of these athletes.

These research objectives are of most importance to several stakeholders comprising of the academia, the CrossFit community, healthcare practitioners, and the athletes themselves. Initially, it adds to the academic conversation by addressing an important need in the literature on the body image experiences of pregnant female CrossFit athletes. Second, it provides practical advice for CrossFit athletes, coaches, and health-care professionals involved in assisting women through the complex journey of pregnancy and postpartum. Finally, it can enhance societal awareness regarding the specific challenges suffered by female athletes during pregnancy, promoting a more inclusive perspective towards women's experiences within the area of physical activity and health.

The research also explores how pregnancy-related alterations affect the body image perceptions of these athletes including physical, emotional, and psychological dimensions. By addressing these objectives, the study attempts to bridge a void in literature regarding the body image experiences of pregnant CrossFit athletes, to offer practical advice for athletes, coaches, and healthcare professionals, and to highlight the distinct challenges women athletes face during pregnancy.

2.2 Research Questions and Sub-questions

This chapter articulates the main research question and sub-questions that structure the inquiry into the body image experiences of dedicated female CrossFit athletes before and during pregnancy. The questions are designed to systematically explore the nuanced facets of body image expectations and realities within this unique context.

2.2.1 Main Research Question

Main Research Question:

"How do dedicated CrossFit athletes in Denmark perceive changes in their body image surrounding pregnancy?"

This central question, forming the backbone of the study, guides the focus toward the perceptions and experiences of dedicated CrossFit athletes regarding body image changes during and surrounding pregnancy, aiming to gain an understanding of their subjective

experiences and perceptions, thereby providing insights into the physical and psychological changes they undergo within the context of their CrossFit engagement.

2.2.2 Sub-questions

Sub-question 1: What are the pre-pregnancy body image expectations of dedicated CrossFit athletes in Denmark, and how do these expectations vary within this group?

This sub-question explores the initial pre-pregnancy body image expectations of women CrossFit athletes who trained at least three times a week. It aims to demystify the differences in these expectations among the particular population of dedicated CrossFit athletes.

Sub-question 2: How do the actual experiences of pregnancy among dedicated CrossFit athletes in Denmark compare to the body image expectations they held prior to becoming pregnant, and what specific factors contribute to these disparities within this particular group of athletes?

This sub-question explores the contrast between the body image experiences during pregnancy and the pre-pregnancy ideals of dedicated CrossFit athletes. It seeks to pinpoint the elements that bring about the variations within this specific group, which consist of training intensity, objectives, support systems, and psychological elements.

2.2.3 Rationale for Research Questions and Linkage to Research Aim

The formulation of the main research question and sub-questions is based on the goal of obtaining a full understanding of how dedicated female CrossFit athletes in Denmark perceive changes in their body image surrounding pregnancy. In doing so, the research questions seek to detail and capture the subtleties and intricacies that are a part of the intersection of CrossFit engagement and pregnancy. The specific research questions themselves relate to the main purpose of the study as they direct towards what female CrossFit athletes do to cope with pregnancy related body image perceptions. The questions serve as an organized system to scrutinize the parities of body image expectations and experiences, thus, illustrating the life of a CrossFit athlete at that specific intersection. In essence, the studies questions and sub-questions set the stage for an in depth examination of the relationship between body image expectations and the experiences of dedicated CrossFit

athletes contributing to a nuanced information of this transformative journey within the CrossFit network.

2.3 Clarification of Terms

To achieve a better understanding of the research aim and questions, it is crucial to explain the main terms that play a critical role in the research. The following section discusses these concepts in a precise way that guarantees a strong base for a further exposition.

2.3.1 Body Image: A Multidimensional Construct

The concept "body image" implies a multi-faceted idea, containing as it does a person's own feelings, judgments, and emotions about how a person looks (Rodgers et al., 2023). On the other hand, this study conducted by Rodgers et al. (2023) suggests that our impact on body image is inclusive of the way we see our physical self, including our size, shape, and beauty. Body image is not an unmovable image; it changes over time, getting influenced by different factors such as societal standards, cultural ideals, and personal experiences (Zhao et al., 2021). For the research purpose of this study, body image is more than just appearance, it is wrapped up around fitness, and performance among the CrossFit enthusiasts.

2.3.2 Body Image Expectations: Anticipated Perceptions

The term "body image expectations" is used to describe the assumed viewpoints and attitudes people have about their bodies (Swami et al., 2009). The process is about how people anticipate their body's looks and how it will perform, and how they will perceive themselves and others in the future (Zaccagni and Gualdi-Russo, 2023). Such motivations are inspired by different factors, such as personal hopes, social demands, and past experiences (Borodulin et al., 2008)). Knowing these expectations will be the stepping stone for discovering if they agree with the actual experiences of CrossFit athletes during the period of pregnancy.

2.3.3 Pregnancy: A Transformative Period

"Pregnancy" denotes the physiological condition, where the fetus develops within the womb (Davis & Narayan, 2020). The process is deemed to be one of the most stressful events in life that is unique and special as it is characterized by these three major changes: physical,

psychological and emotional (Pięta et al., 2014). Performance changes is the outcome of hormonal level adjustments, weight gain, and bodily function modifications to support the growth of the fetus (Soma-Pillay et al., 2016). Rather than only the biological factors as some researchers assume, the fact is that pregnancy is an individualized, complex, and culturally-derived experience (Pięta et al., 2014). This research focuses on dedicated female CrossFit athletes experiencing this transition over a specific period.

2.3.4 CrossFit: High-Intensity Functional Training

The phrase "Crossfit" represents a high intensity fitness routine that is composed of functional movements performed at a faster pace (Claudio et al., 2018). It is a combination of a large number of different sports contests including weightlifting, cardio sports, and gymnastics. Conducive to CrossFit is the idea of increasing variety especially in performing common exercises and, thus the results of typical fitness can be achieved (Sprey et al., 2016). CrossFit communities usually generate a sense of camaraderie, and athletes undertake such intense and different exercises as a group (Whiteman-Sandland et al., 2016). The research is about those CrossFit devotees who do three sessions or more per week before they get pregnant.

2.3.5 Social Comparison: Evaluative Processes

The term "social comparison" refers to the evaluative processes of assessment of oneself in the context of others (Festinger, 1954). It can be done within certain communities, such as CrossFit, or at a wider level of social norms. This project will examine social comparison to determine how pregnant athletes in CrossFit compare their body image expectations and experiences to their peers, whether within or outside of the CrossFit community.

2.3.6 Dedicated CrossFit Athletes: Distinguishing Factors

The term "dedicated" in the current study refers to those who have attained high levels of performance and proficiency in the CrossFit through frequent training. This group of CrossFit athletes represents those that are dedicated to their training and are faithful to the course, attending sessions at least three times a week pre-pregnancy. The selection of this term suggests that the frequent training is a symbol of the significant devotion and active

participation in the CrossFit activities, which results in excellent fitness and skills. This is not meant to create any hierarchy but rather to recognize the various levels of dedication within the CrossFit athlete community. The categorization based on training frequency is done with the presumption that athletes who attend CrossFit workouts a minimum of three times a week develop an even stronger bond with the philosophy. Different aspects of their exposure to the training experience, such as the training regimen, community dynamics, and performance expectations, may have different impacts on the formation of their body image perception.

This part of the chapter lays the foundation for the research aim and objectives. Knowing and understanding these terms are all what's needed to begin the following chapters and have a full understanding of the pregnancy related body image expectations and experiences of the dedicated female CrossFit athletes.

3. Previous Research

CrossFit has become one of the most popular ways to get fit, drawing in all types of people due to its functionality and intensity. This is evident by its appeal to the large number of women, who find in the game a challenge and a motivation at the same time. Aside from just exercise, CrossFit is a social interaction, community and common goal pursuit. Nevertheless, with more women taking CrossFit as part of their fitness life, there is a question that comes regarding if CrossFit is compatible with maternal health during pregnancy. The intersection of CrossFit and pregnancy requires an exploration on a number of aspects, among them body image perceptions, social interaction, physiological adaptations, exercise patterns, and the impact of both environment and psychological elements. As the relation of pregnancy and sports participation is in constant focus, an understanding of different aspects of body image comes to be one of the main themes. A number of studies coincide regarding the role of the body image perception in sportswomen, thus, clarifying the interaction of sporting activities, the norms of beauty set by the society and individual ideal of the body.

3.1 Body Image Perceptions

In their 2023 article, Zaccagni and Gualdi-Russo provide a comprehensive insight into body image perceptions of athletes, showing how the body image perception of individuals is defined by their involvement in sports in more subtle ways. Their research shows that athletes, including pregnant athletes, might have unique obstacles and distresses concerning the body image, caused by aspects such as performance demands, social comparisons, and media representation of ideal bodies. This is in line with an enhanced view of body image not only as individual factors but also as sociocultural influences, which may be extremely important for those athletes who play competitive or high intensity sports such as CrossFit. However, despite the comprehensive insights provided by previous research, there is a need to further problematize certain aspects of the existing literature. The article by Swami et al. (2009) focuses on the variation in body size ideals, body dissatisfaction, and media influence among female athletes and non-athletes. Although their study does not particularly target pregnancy or sports participation during pregnancy, it offers useful information on how engagement in sports activities can influence body image perceptions. Pregnant

sportswomen, like non-pregnant athletes, as well as all other women, have to cope with the beauty ideals and society's expectations concerning body size and shape and, as a result, their self-esteem and well-being during pregnancy. In their study, Rodgers et al. (2023), widen the conversation to the whole world by making body image a global mental health issue and highlighting its role within the overall framework of mental health. Their results stress the need to take into account athletes' psychological well-being such as their body image even in enhancing general mental health. This point of view emphasizes the interdependent relationship of body image and mental health and thus has implications that improving the body image perceptions may have more implications for athlete psychological well-being during pregnancy and beyond. Also, the study by Fredrickson & Roberts (1997) has provided some insight that exercise has coping effects on the body image. The results highlight the importance of physical activity in increasing self-esteem and cultivating positive self-perception which is in line with the positive body image exhibited by the participants before pregnancy. In addition, Tiggemann (2011) addresses social comparison and perceived norms in athletes' body image, which further adds the complexity to body image in sport. This work highlights that social transactions and personal characteristics come together to construct body image perceptions of sport people and provides a useful framework for interpreting the body image experiences of CrossFit athletes in this study.

3.2 Psychological Adaptation

In addition, Köteles et al's (2016) work provides information about psychological aspects of CrossFit training that includes exercise frequency and its association with everyday psychological functioning of people. Their results add to the literature on the psychological advantages of exercise, emphasizing the potential positive outcomes of high-intensity training modalities such as CrossFit on people's mental health. Though the research is confined to CrossFit training, it adds to the wider research of psychological outcomes of various exercise programs. Knowing psychological corollaries of CrossFit training is crucial for guiding exercise prescription and intervention strategies targeted at improving people's mental health via physical activity. While studies have shed light on the sociocultural influences shaping body image perceptions, there remains a lack of nuanced understanding regarding how these influences manifest differently across diverse athletic populations.

Besides, Linde et al.'s (2022) prospective study provides tremendous advantage in terms of the course and predictors of body image dissatisfaction in pregnancy. Their results add to the already existing literature on how pregnant women perceive their bodies, and underscore the fact that body image experiences change during pregnancy. Although they concentrate on pregnant women, their study is a part of a developing body of evidence that study the psychological aspects of pregnancy and the factors that influence women's well-being during this epoch. The awareness of course and determinants of body image dissatisfaction during pregnancy is important in developing the interventions targeted at enhancing good body image and psychological outcomes among pregnant women. In addition, the study by Perales et al. (2017) adds knowledge to the psychological aspects of pregnancy and sport by looking at the association between exercise during pregnancy and maternal mental health. Through the analysis of exercise influence on maternal mental illness, this research provides essential information concerning potential advantages of physical activity for creating the right bodily image perceptions and general well-being of pregnant sportswomen.

3.3 Exercise Effects on Body Image

In addition, the study of Baştuğ et al. (2016) is beneficial as it gives new insights into the influence of various types of exercises on women's body composition and body image such as CrossFit, Pilates, and Zumba. Their results add to the literature on the association between exercise and body image perceptions in women. Although the research of theirs does not directly pay attention to the pregnancy or sports participation during the pregnancy, it provides useful information about the potential benefits that exercise programs can have in terms of the improvement of body composition and body image, and this information may be useful for the women who are involved in the fitness activities during the pregnancy. Additionally, the study by Ålgars et al. (2009) is a very significant contribution to the literature on body image perceptions in adults, as it provides the influence of age, gender, and BMI on the body image of people. Their results confirm the significance of demographic factors in understanding body image concerns and stress the need for specific interventions that are appropriate for the peculiarities of different demographic groups. Although their investigation does not directly concentrate on pregnancy or participation in sports during pregnancy, it delivers beneficial background data that would help us to comprehend the

differences in perception of body image among various populations, such as pregnant women involved in sports activities. Lastly, the work by Borodulin et al. (2008) offers important information on exercise patterns during pregnancy, and this lays a foundation for the use of body image experiences by the pregnant athletes who take part in CrossFit. This study provides wider notions of maternity health and fitness by examining frequency and types of exercises pregnant women perform, thus, allowing various views on the relationship of physical activity and pregnancy.

3.4 CrossFit Community and Body Image

Furthermore, the study by Coyne and Woodruff (2020) presents a major contribution to the literature on body image, self-esteem, and eating behaviors in the CrossFit community. Their study gives important knowledge about the possible effects of CrossFit participation on women's psychological well-being, emphasizing the necessity of further investigation into how fitness environments can mold individuals' attitudes and behaviors in regard to body image and eating. Though not explicitly talking about pregnancy or sports participation during pregnancy, this study provides useful insights on the effects of engaging in fitness activities such as CrossFit on women's experiences during pregnancy, mainly with regard to body image perceptions and self-esteem. Moreover, the study of Podmore and Ogle (2018) makes an important contribution to the literature on body image perception in the context of CrossFit training. Their results bring important information about the intricate connection between involvement in CrossFit and the emergence of body image ideals and management strategies. Although not specifically addressing pregnancy or athletic involvement when pregnant, this study provides a foundation of the experience of body image in the CrossFit community, which can be used as a basis for future research in regards to how pregnancy intersects with the fitness experiences of women, specifically in high-intensity training modalities like CrossFit.

3.5 Copying Strategies and Social Support

Prewitt-White et al. (2018) and Gaston and Cramp (2011) also underscore social support networks and community cohesion in promoting exercise adherence in pregnant athletes. The feeling of belonging and fellowship within sport communities as in CrossFit gyms might act

as a protective buffer against negative body image perceptions and allow women to remain active when pregnant. This is in line with the focus on the central role of social support and community participation in the achievement of positive body image changes during pregnancy, as stated by Al-Mutawtah et al. (2023). Both studies emphasize the role of supportive networks in forming pregnancy body image expectations and experiences, with the stress being on the need to comprehend the impact of social support on body image perceptions during this challenging time. In the same way, Muktabhant et al. (2015) provide insights into coping mechanisms used by pregnant athletes, what reflects well with the adaptive coping strategies in the case of CrossFit athletes. This study, through the investigation of different coping approaches utilized by pregnant women in coping with the demands brought about by pregnancy, provides a relevant background for the understanding of how athletes manage body image concerns while pregnant and emphasizes the significance of adaptive coping strategies in the promotion of favorable body image results. Furthermore, the ethnographic case study by Edmonds (2019) offers highly pertinent information in regard to the geographies of CrossFit by providing a deep analysis of spatial and social dynamics inside a CrossFit Box. Through an analysis of the spatial organization, social interactions, and community processes in a CrossFit facility, the study contributes to the knowledge of the sociocultural dimensions of CrossFit involvement. Although the majority of the existing literature has concentrated on the physiological and psychological impacts of CrossFit training, the Edmonds' study emphasizes the necessity to regard the built environment and social context in determining the exercise experiences of individuals. Geographic knowledge of CrossFit is important to the creation of the facility design, programming, and community-building initiatives in CrossFit Boxes and other fitness venues. Finally, Juhl et al. (2010) suggests to explore partner support and spousal dynamics in the context of body image perceptions during pregnancy, underscoring the importance of interpersonal relationships in the body image experiences of pregnant sport participants.

3.6 Research Gap

While existing literature delves into the broader aspects of body image during pregnancy, there exists a distinct void in understanding the nuanced experiences of a specific cohort: inspirational female CrossFit athletes. The void in this research field is seen when we look at

the issues that are specific to this population, which arise during pregnancy. The existing literature on body image during pregnancy limits itself to the general population, typically with very general findings that don't break down into the specific realm of athletes, which is very true for CrossFit athletes who train high-intensity workouts (Erkaya et al., 2018). Consequently, a special examination may be required to share how the distinctive nature of CrossFit (emphasizing strength, performance, and community) affects body image attitudes and reality during pregnancy transformation.

Therefore, the study seeks to bridge the vacuum in the exploration of how the body image ideals and reality influence pregnant female CrossFit athletes. The study will provide fresh outlooks that not only add to an already existing body of knowledge but also give a comprehensive and balanced picture of the unique challenges experienced by committed CrossFit athletes in the midst of their transformative pregnancy adventure.

4. Theoretical Perspectives

Understanding the pregnancy and body image experiences of dedicated female CrossFit athletes require an exploration of two fundamental theories—Social Comparison Theory and Coping Theory. Let's undertake a full and thorough journey into every theory to reveal their complexities and nuances.

4.1 Social Comparison Theory

Social Comparison Theory that was framed in 1954 by the social psychologist Leon Festinger states that people gauge their beliefs and values by comparing themselves with others, particularly in uncertain circumstances (Festinger, 1954). This theory posits that humans have an innate desire to compare themselves with others, so they choose similar people to themselves. Through comparing themselves to others, individuals become aware of their own position and put their social world into perspective. This postulate implies that ranking is a natural inclination of people to compare their skills, opinions or attributes with others and that helps reducing uncertainty as well as a person's self-assessment (Festinger, 1954). Within the framework of this study, Social Comparison Theory becomes a very effective instrument for analyzing the way that pregnant CrossFit athletes negotiate their body image expectations and practices. This theory acknowledges the inherently social character of individuals and reveals the processes of how comparisons within and outside the CrossFit community affect perceptions and attitudes. The usage of Social Comparison Theory in this master thesis enables us to explore the subtle interrelations among the interpersonal comparisons within the small and tight-knit community of CrossFit athletes. The knowledge of how these women perceive themselves in the context of their peers gives us vital information regarding social forces that form body image perceptions in the transitional stage of pregnancy. However, it is vital to identify the limitations of Social Comparison Theory. But such approach is too general and simplified, it does not take into account the individual and personal aspect of this process (White et al., 2006). The theory may not completely capture the variety of coping strategies and expectations within the specific CrossFit community.

Also, the Social Comparison Theory suggests that people make comparisons both upward, where they compare themselves to people who are perceived to be more successful, and downward, where they compare themselves to people who are thought of as being less successful (Festinger, 1954). This type of dual process of comparison performs the role of self-evaluation and a way for strengthening and maintaining a high level of self-esteem. In general, Social Comparison Theory offers a thorough model for understanding the manner in which people maneuver social interactions and develop their self-concept in comparison with others. Even though Social Comparison Theory provides understanding of the way people deal with uncertainty by comparison, it might not take into account the subtleties of individual experiences (White et al., 2006). The theory focuses on the issue of interpersonal comparisons within communities such as CrossFit thereby, explains the general social determinants of body image perceptions during pregnancy. Although Social Comparison Theory provides a fruitful template in regard to the social factors involved, it should be supplemented by analysis of individual differences and personal factors. In addition, Festinger's theory emphasizes the role of comparison in uncertainty reduction and self-assessment support function though it does not consider or does not discuss in sufficient detail the adverse effects of comparison processes. Pregnant CrossFit athletes may continue to feel the pressure of comparison to their peers and the societal expectations of fit and healthy motherhood that causes them to be unhappy with their ever changing body. So, when irreparable physical changes are inherent, the effects of such comparisons should be carefully analyzed in this context. Social Comparison Theory clarifies how people evaluate themselves in relation to others however one needs to remember the broader implications of these evaluations.

4.2 Coping Theory (Transactional Model of Stress and Coping)

Coping Theory, particularly the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping developed by Richard Lazarus and Susan Folkman, posits that individuals engage in a continuous process of appraising and coping with stressors (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). At its core, this theory suggests that individuals first assess the significance of a stressor, known as primary

appraisal, followed by an evaluation of their ability to cope with it, termed secondary appraisal. Based on these cognitive appraisals, individuals select and implement coping strategies to manage the stressor and its associated emotions (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Coping strategies can vary widely and may include problem-focused coping, which involves actively addressing the stressor, or emotion-focused coping, which focuses on managing the emotional distress associated with the stressor (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Furthermore, the Transactional Model acknowledges that coping depends on a number of personal and environmental factors, including personality characteristics, social support, and the perceived controllability of the stressor (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In general, Coping Theory provides useful knowledge about the dynamic processes that people use for appraising and coping with stressors which emphasize the role of cognitive evaluations and adaptive coping strategies in handling life adversities. In the context of pregnant CrossFit athletes, Coping Theory, particularly the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, provides an appropriate framework to grasp the life experiences of pregnant CrossFit athletes as they cope with the physical and emotional challenges of pregnancy. In this regard, coping strategies are critical in determining how athletes interpret and act in response to changes in their body image expectations and behaviors. Through the application of Coping Theory to the experiences of pregnant CrossFit athletes, researchers may obtain knowledge of the adaptive strategies employed by these athletes to cope with stressors associated with pregnancy and performance as athletes. Insight into coping mechanisms used by expectant CrossFit athletes can help in the creation of supportive interventions that are specific to their needs and thus, ensuring their overall well-being during this transition period.

In the realm of body image expectations during pregnancy, Coping Theory offers a lens through which to examine how pregnant CrossFit athletes appraise and cope with the changes in their bodies. This theory highlights the cognitive processes involved in evaluating body image perceptions and the strategies individuals employ to manage any associated stress or dissatisfaction. Coping theory and body image expectations in pregnancy as they intersect can be used to reveal the coping strategies used by pregnant CrossFit athletes to keep a positive body image and mental health throughout the pregnancy periods. These types of findings could be used in interventions that are designed to foster the positivity of the body

and resilience among pregnant athletes to improve their overall experiences of pregnancy and athleticism.

4.3 Rationale for Theory Choice

Through the lens of these theories, the research aims to identify patterns and variations in how pregnant CrossFit athletes perceive their bodies surrounding pregnancy. Social Comparison Theory reveals patterns of interpersonal comparisons, whereas Coping Theory uncovers different coping mechanisms used by individuals and the community (Festinger, 1954; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The mutual impact between these theories clarifies the complex interactions within the CrossFit community and, thus, offers valuable information for women who are pregnant and engaged in high-intensity training.

According to the study by Collins and Stockton (2018) recognizing the strengths and limitations of each theory is pivotal for navigating any research, in this case the complexities of body image within the unique context of CrossFit engagement during pregnancy. Therefore, the table on the following page (titled *Table 1*) intends to provide the strengths and limitations of these theoretical models in understanding body image perceptions in CrossFit athletes. Through the integration of these perspectives, I aim to deliver a sophisticated analysis that offers significant contributions for both academic research and practical interventions within the CrossFit and healthcare communities.

The social psychology cornerstone, Social Comparison Theory, retrospects on individuals' self-evaluation depending on others, mostly in CrossFit's communal setting. Although it is good at recording common experiences but it may overgeneralize different experiences of pregnant CrossFit athletes and miss the internal coping mechanisms. In addition, Coping Theory implies individual's active coping in the stress management, providing diversity of approaches within the CrossFit community. But, it lacks the totality of communal coping experiences or universality for all athletes, requiring a particular perception of body images in this regard.

Table 1: Evaluation of Theoretical Frameworks - Strengths and Limitations

Theory	Strengths	Limitations
Social Comparison Theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Social Comparison Theory aligns with the communal nature of CrossFit, where individuals often train together and share common goals. - The theory excels in exploring how shared experiences within the CrossFit community impact body image perceptions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Social Comparison Theory may oversimplify the nuanced and individualized experiences of pregnant CrossFit athletes, neglecting the diversity within the community. - The focus on external comparisons might not fully capture the internal coping mechanisms shaping body image perceptions.
Coping Theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Coping Theory highlights the active role individuals play in managing stress, offering insights into personal agency in coping strategies. - The theory recognizes the diversity of coping strategies employed by individuals, which is crucial in the context of a varied CrossFit community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Coping Theory may not fully capture the collective aspects of shared coping experiences within the CrossFit community, where communal strategies may play a significant role. - The individualized nature of coping mechanisms might not universally apply to all pregnant CrossFit athletes, leading to varied responses.

5. Methodology

5.1 Introduction

In any research project, what method is used is significant for producing reliable and meaningful results (Gratton & Jones, 2010). It is based on a well-defined framework and methods of collecting, processing, and interpreting information, thereby, guaranteeing the quality and validity of the study results (Leavy, 2014). The chapter presents the research design and methodology used in the study, specifically with regards to the collection, analysis, and validation of the data. Through a deep exploration of these methodological elements, this chapter aims at revealing the systematic approach adopted to address the research questions and objectives.

5.2 Research Design

The methodology employed in this study is qualitative research design. Qualitative research provides a multi-faceted way of understanding the intricacies of human experiences that permits thorough evaluation and analysis of participants' narratives and viewpoints (Leavy, 2014). The qualitative research design was selected because of its appropriateness to catch the richness and depth of participants' experiences related to body image and pregnancy. Because the body image perceptions are multi-sided and I aimed to find out in detail individual opinions, qualitative methods are perfectly suitable for this study. Qualitative approaches such as an online qualitative survey and thematic analysis were used to reveal nuances of the body image expectations and experiences of pregnant CrossFit athletes. The selected research design is designed in close relation with the research questions and objectives of the study. Through the adoption of a qualitative approach, the study answered the research questions in a way that fosters the exploration of participants' lived experiences and perceptions. The qualitative approach allowed me to look deeper into the underlying causes, motives, and feelings related to the body image expectations and experiences of the participants, hence, providing the valuable information on this phenomenon (Skinner et al., 2021). Qualitative research is flexible and offers depth of exploration, it allows the participants to express themselves freely and gives the researcher rich data for analysis

(Tracy, 2013). This structure allowed me to embrace different views and practices, thus, enhancing deeper knowledge of the complicated interaction between pregnancy, CrossFit participation, and women's perception of their body image.

To sum up, the qualitative research design utilized in this study provides a strong foundation for studying body image expectations, experiences, and coping strategies in pregnant dedicated CrossFit athletes. Through a qualitative method, the study sought to dig into the subtleties of participant narratives and offer useful pieces of knowledge that will enrich what is already known in the area.

5.3 Data Collection

Data gathering is an important part of the research process which defines the depth and detail of information gathered (Gratton & Jones, 2010). This chapter provides the detailed methodology used for data collection on the perceptions of body image by pregnant and post-pregnant CrossFit female athletes. This study used a qualitative survey approach to listen to the intimate and individual stories of pregnant CrossFit athletes. The open-ended character of qualitative questions permits the participants to express their thoughts, feelings, and perceptions without any restrictions (Gratton & Jones, 2010; Tracy, 2013).

5.3.1 Data Collection Instruments - Online Qualitative Survey

Data collection instrument was an online qualitative survey containing 12 open-ended questions. The questions were targeted at body image expectations and experiences during pregnancy, coping mechanisms, and the congruence of the anticipations with reality. The guide for the online survey with all questions included can be found in *Appendix A1.1*. The qualitative survey approach is a method of research that focuses on the investigation and comprehension of people's experiences, perspectives, and feelings through open-ended questions (Braun et al., 2020). This approach enables the participants to tell their own stories which provide enough data for in-depth analysis (Braun et al., 2020).

The survey is structured into three main sections:

- Exploring Pre-Pregnancy Body Image Expectations
- Examining the Impact of Pregnancy Experiences on Body Image

- Exploring the Alignment of Expectations vs. Reality

In favour of using qualitative surveys, several arguments can be put forth. To begin with, open-ended qualitative research questions allow comprehensive discussion of thoughts and feelings of the participants (Gratton & Jones, 2010). This is quite important, especially in the case of the investigation of some delicate subjects such as body image during the various stages of pregnancy. In this format, respondents are able to elaborate on their experiences, which offers a nuanced perspective that would be missed by a more structured or closed-ended survey (Leavy, 2014). Moreover, online qualitative surveys enable a comfortable and less intrusive platform for the participants to discuss personal experiences (Gratton & Jones, 2010). This anonymity may promote the sense of truthfulness as people feel more comfortable expressing their thoughts and emotions without the fear of judgment or social desirability bias. In addition, the qualitative survey method allows for the representation of different views among the CrossFit community, thus, taking into account people of different backgrounds, life experiences, and lifestyle (Tracy, 2013). This would guarantee that the research will include the complexity and diversity of the population which is important because body image is multifaceted and is influenced by individual differences and special social conditions (Rodgers et al., 2023). Qualitative survey approach is important in the context of the CrossFit athletes in pregnancy for several reasons. It provides the flexibility to busy mothers who are a major part of the target participants. Negrin et al. (2021) point out of the necessity to modify research methods to suit the requirements and incentives of the participants. Balancing CrossFit training, motherhood, and potential professional commitments can be challenging, and an online survey provides the flexibility for participants to respond at their convenience, accommodating the unpredictable and demanding schedules of mothers (Gratton & Jones, 2010). This flexibility acknowledges the unpredictability of parenting responsibilities, making it more feasible for mothers to contribute their experiences. Also, using an online qualitative survey form promotes increased availability and inclusiveness, given the varied and possibly worldwide end-points of CrossFit practitioners. Accessibility assumes the role of an important factor in eliminating the limitations of physical presence because athletes from different parts can participate (Gratton & Jones, 2010). Such inclusivity fortifies diversity in terms of perspectives, thus improving the quality of the whole data.

5.4 Participants

Participants needed to meet the following criteria:

- 1) Female CrossFit athletes who trained at least three times a week before pregnancy.
- 2) Currently in their late stages of pregnancy (7 months or more) or have given birth in the last 2 years.
- 3) Residing in Denmark.

5.5 Recruitment

Recruiting for this study was based on a tactical partnership with CrossFit clubs in Copenhagen, Denmark, and interactive participation via the appropriate social media groups. In order to obtain a diverse and representative pool of participants with different backgrounds and perspectives, the recruitment strategy involved placing invitation messages on the Facebook groups of three different sport gyms with CrossFit classes. It should be mentioned that these gyms remain nameless in order to protect the confidentiality. These gyms are rooted in the community and all have a strong membership base, with the Facebook groups combined to several thousands of members. The management of these gyms was contacted, and arrangements and agreements were reached to post the research invitation post to their Facebook groups. This invitation can be found in *Appendix A1.3.2*. This method not only harnessed the online communities that these gyms have but also captured the wide demographic that is present in these groups. In addition, one of these gyms runs specialized classes for mothers with babies, creating a special chance to approach this part of the participants that could bring special perspectives and experiences to the study. The inclusion of these custom classes added more diversity to the participant pool and helped in having a more complete picture of body image perceptions before and during pregnancy in CrossFit context.

Other than the partnerships with CrossFit clubs and the interaction in social media groups, the recruitment approach also involved the distribution of the research invitation via my personal Instagram account. I am an active member of the CrossFit community and a member of one of the three gyms where the invitation was posted, and I used my network to expand the study's scope. Hence, recruitment for the study also included Instagram messages with

invitations to participate to eleven dedicated CrossFit athletes with public profiles, who then had the option to complete the survey. The selection of these athletes was made based on their active participation in the CrossFit community and their ability to deliver useful information about body image perceptions during and after pregnancy. The messages contained the short description of the goals of the study and criteria for participation, thereby ensuring the transparency and informed choice. This invitation can be found in *Appendix A1.3.1*. This recruitment strategy targeted a wide range of participants who were to be revered and autonomous, while also ensuring privacy. My involvement within the CrossFit community made me more knowledgeable of its dynamics, hence, more accessible and concentrated. Additionally, I contacted eight women from my personal network that met the criteria via Instagram messages with invitations to participate. This invitation can be found in *Appendix A1.3.1*. *This strategy brought a level of individualization and trust because these people might have been more willing to participate in the study, given that they knew me.* My affiliation with the CrossFit community offered understanding on participant experiences, however, possible biases needed to be recognized. Transparency in the process of recruitment allowed for honest feedback while measures decrease coercion, in so doing, people are free to choose. Openness to the feedback created trust in the research setting.

5.5.1 Minimizing Coercion

In an effort to minimize coercion and promote a sense of empowerment and trust within the research process, several intentional strategies were implemented, as recommended by Gratton and Jones (2010) as this is crucial for any qualitative research study. For detailed explanations of steps on minimizing coercion and ethical considerations in the research process, please refer to the "Considerations" chapter, specifically the subchapter on ethical considerations.

5.6 Pilot Testing

Pilot testing is considered as an integral part of research methodology that focuses on the initial evaluation of research tools and methods in terms of efficacy and reliability before being fully implemented (Malmqvist et al., 2019). It helps in identification and solving of any possible problems or weakness of the data collection instruments and therefore ensuring

the validity and reliability of study results (van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2002). Pilot testing helps in examining the understandability, suitability, and acceptability of survey items, interview schedules, or experimental measures, as well as in appraising the practicality and feasibility of data collection approaches (Gratton & Jones, 2010). In addition, pilot testing promotes the cooperation and feedback sharing among the members of the research group, which results in methodological improvement and optimization (Malmqvist et al., 2019).

In the current setting of this study, due to the narrow focus, short duration of the study, and one-man-research-team, the pilot testing was done with the help of two master's students from separate universities in Denmark. Although the sample was small, the feedback gave great clarity, simplicity, and effectiveness of the survey instrument and method. Remarkably, the feedback received from the pilot subjects about the clarity, comprehensibility, and relevance of the survey questions to the research aims showed that they were suitable as they were and needed no changes. Such result not only validated the strength of the survey instrument but also highlighted the careful development and design of the research approach. Additionally, the pilot testing was a peer driven process creating a research friendly environment and supporting the development and validation of the study methodology.

In summary, successful pilot testing confirmed the appropriateness and effectiveness of the research strategy and prepared the ground for the easy implementation of the main data collection phase.

5.7 Data Analysis

In data analysis of this study, I used a systematic thematic analysis method in order to bring out valuable insights from the qualitative data collected through an online qualitative survey. Thematic analysis is a qualitative research approach that attempts to find, analyze, and report the patterns within the data that enables a comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences and perspectives (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The process commenced with acquainting, in which I went through the survey responses thoroughly to get a complete insight into the data. This stage saw focus on recurring issues, typical topics and differences among the participants' stories. This required for me to be immersed in the data, to go through each response with care and to mark down important

phrases or recurring themes (Gratton & Jones, 2010). Following this, initial codes were developed to classify the data in a logical manner using the identified patterns and themes. The codes were developed to represent particular ideas, situations, or feelings communicated by the participants. Every code was a single feature of the data and therefore, was a base of the next analysis. The use of concepts and lived experiences as codes in place of single words was a conscious choice meant to capture the depth and complexity of the narratives of the participants (Saldaña, 2016). Although one-word codes may provide simplicity and convenience of classification, they usually over-simplify the subtle experiences communicated by participants. With concepts and experiences being used as codes, I aimed at retaining the depth and detail of participants' stories so that an extensive and in-depth analysis of their experiences could be conducted (Saldaña, 2016). For instance, I used the code "Sense of Power and Empowerment from CrossFit" rather than a single-word code such as "strength" to cover the various dimensions of the participants' feelings of strength, pride, and empowerment that derive from their CrossFit participation. Such wider code did not only reflect the meaning of participants' experiences, but also provided context and depth to their narratives. Similarly, coding with labels like "Struggles with Body Image and Eating Disorders" helped me to reflect the intertwined character of the participant's problems concerning body image and disordered eating, but not treating them as two different problems. Such a method accepted the diversity of respondent's experiences and made sure that important details would not be lost during the process of analysis.

As the analysis progressed, codes were grouped into subthemes based on their conceptual similarities and relationships. Subthemes represented broader categories that encapsulated related codes, providing a more organized structure to the analysis. Lastly, overarching themes were generated to merge the results and underline the key areas to be covered by the data. Themes represented the most abstract level and were designed to sum up the core ideas and patterns that surfaced from the analysis. The utilization of concepts and experiences as codes allowed me to perform a comprehensive and detailed analysis of the qualitative data, which in turn, provided an extensive insight into the participants' body image expectations, experiences, and coping strategies during pregnancy.

5.8 Validity and Reliability

The chapter on validity and reliability in this study of dedicated athletes in CrossFit amplifies the thoroughness taken to guarantee the accuracy and dependability of the study results. The choice of data collection approaches was systematically considered in order to accommodate the constraints of participants, and the final chosen method is an online qualitative survey. This technique was selected because it was able to draw a variety of views from a group of people from different places. The survey incorporated simple and brief instructions to aid ease of accessibility and comprehension to all the participants. Survey questions were designed with utmost care to eliminate vagueness and stimulate accuracy in responses that was a sign of the research team's devotion to methodological precision. Additionally, this subchapter elaborates upon the measures implemented to eliminate potential researcher biases and keep the transparency during the research. The research study is very transparent about my involvement in data collection and analysis, highlighting the idea of reflexivity and self-introspection. A strong peer-review process which includes master's students peers evaluates the validity and reliability of the research enhancing the study with various perspectives and strengthening its methodological soundness. Recognizing the inherent limitations of self-reported data and the online survey format, several measures were taken to minimize possible limitations. Validation checks, such as double-checking data entry, peer review, and pilot testing, were used to increase the reliability of the results.

To deal with possible researcher bias, I used some measures to keep the objectivity and to reduce the effect of the irrelevant factors on the research findings. I as an active CrossFit practitioner embedded in the CrossFit community was aware that personal experiences and connections within the community could create bias. In order to minimize this bias, a number of particular actions were made at different stages of the research. To begin with, I took a reflexive stand, continually reflecting my personal perspective and inherent biases that come with being a member of the CrossFit community. For instance, as a CrossFitter myself I admitted the possible impact of my own biases on the interpretation of data collected. Additionally, I ensured that there was no interaction between me and the individuals in my CrossFit social circle as the researcher. For instance, I made sure that any contact or conversation made to Crossfit members while conducting research was professional and did

not affect the study in any way. This self-awareness was recorded in the research study, exhibiting honesty and integrity. In addition, I maintained clear distinction of my role as a researcher and personal relationships within the CrossFit community. Even though I might have had personal friendships with some of the respondents without knowing for sure, I was reflective in terms of data collection and analysis, considering all the answers equally and without any bias. Furthermore, I sought the help of independent reviewers who were not part of the CrossFit community to provide critique on the research process and findings. Their points of view provided important ideas and contributed to the validity and reliability of the research results. Employing reflexivity, I was able to critically self-reflect and filter out any personal bias that could have had an impact on the study. For instance, I identified the CrossFit practices that I engage in to understand if they had any bearing on my analysis of participants' responses. This comprised keeping a diary that outlined my biases and how they might affect the study data and conclusions. Moreover, I requested feedback from fellow master students to confirm or reject my analysis and minimize bias from own perception. These reflections and conversations helped to shape a better understanding of the research subject that is free from bias.

6. Findings

6.1 Introduction

The table on the following page, titled "*Table 2*" provides an analysis of body image expectations and experiences among dedicated CrossFit athletes in the course of the transformative phase of pregnancy, incorporating essential themes, subthemes and codes that emerged from a comprehensive thematic analysis of qualitative data, thus, providing a thorough understanding. All this is done in order to explore how pregnancy impacts the body image of dedicated female CrossFit athletes in Denmark. This chapter discusses different aspects of body image perceptions, pre-pregnancy views, coping strategies, and factors determining the concordance or non-concordance during pregnancy. Each part of the table deals with various aspects of the athletes' experiences, and reveals the intricate relationship between physical, emotional and social elements within the CrossFit community.

The findings come from analyzing all the collected data together. Instead of looking at each survey question's answers separately, they are combined to create a complete view of the investigation. My personal experiences are also included to some extent, adding depth to the interpretation. The first part of the findings, Chapter 6.2, focuses primarily on the first subquestion, while the second part, with Chapters 6.3 to 6.5, aims to answer the second subquestion. This integration avoids strict divisions, allowing insights from one area to help answer the other subquestion. This holistic approach deepens the analysis, providing a more detailed understanding of the complexities of body image perceptions among CrossFit athletes during pregnancy. Therefore, findings combined from both parts create a complete overview of the research area and aim to answer the main research question.

Table 2: Body Image Expectations and Experiences Among Dedicated CrossFit Athletes Before and During Pregnancy

Themes	Subthemes	Codes
Pre-pregnancy Body Image	Pre-Pregnancy Body Image Perspectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sense of Power and Empowerment from CrossFit • Positive Feelings about Body Before Pregnancy • Struggles with Body Image, Mental Health and Eating Disorders • Perceived Standards of Perfection in CrossFit • Uncertainty and Fear of Weight Gain • Desire for Control Over Weight Gain
	Influence of Comparison	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upward and downward comparisons • Influence on body image and social validation • Negative emotions from perceived inadequacy
Anticipation vs. Reality	The Influence of CrossFit on Body Image in Pregnancy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uncertainty and Doubt About Body Changes • Expectation of Minimal Physical Changes • Desire to Maintain Pre-Pregnancy Fitness Level • Influence of Social Media and Fitness Trends
	Physical and Emotional Impact of Pregnancy on Body Image	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Balancing pre-pregnancy fitness with pregnancy changes • Emotional rollercoaster • Disconnection from body • New meaning and pride from feeling the baby • Development of healthier body
	Influence of Comparison in Pregnancy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivation from Comparisons with Peers • Negative Emotions from Comparisons • Change in Perspective on Comparison Post-Pregnancy
	Key Moments and Phases During Pregnancy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emergence of emotional issues with advancing pregnancy • Increased emotional intensity • Positive experiences counteracting pregnancy difficulties
Coping Mechanisms	Coping with Pregnancy Body Image Changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engagement in Modified Exercise Regimens • Utilization of Psychological Coping Strategies • Seeking Social Support and Engagement • Adoption of Positive Reframing Techniques • Prioritization of Self-Care Behaviors
Factors Influencing Experience	Aligning Pregnancy Expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Idealized Expectations vs. Actual Experiences • Maintaining Positive Body Image Amidst Physical Changes • Challenges in Adjusting to New Realities • Moments of Resilience Amidst Challenges • Redefining Values and Priorities During Pregnancy
	Finding Positivity Amidst Body Image Changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social support and community solidarity fostering resilience • Significance of self-care and mental health focus • Concentrating on the end goal and enjoying the pregnancy process
	Varied Perspectives on Body Image Changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diverse ways women cope with pregnancy burdens • Unique Perspectives of Community Support • Differing perceptions based on competitive and non-competitive attitudes • Acknowledging different emotional responses
	Navigating Body Image Changes with Resilience and Compassion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasis on resilience and adjusting to body changes • Advice to prepare for the unexpected and accept bodily changes • Understanding pregnancy as a period of unpredictable change

6.2 Pre-Pregnancy Body Image

6.2.1 Pre-Pregnancy Body Image Perspectives

By being a CrossFit member myself, reading through survey responses helped me to completely understand the wide range of experiences that my fellow athletes had. One of the following sentiments really stood out to me as it simply stated the athlete's complete and utter confidence in their body and its ability, and the positive change in self-image due to CrossFit. This highlights the transformative impact of CrossFit in fostering a sense of empowerment and self-assurance among its practitioners: "During my athletic career before becoming pregnant, my feelings about my body were generally very positive I would say. You know, that feeling of strength and empowerment? CrossFit brought that big time." Such a statement indicates that CrossFit influences the formation of positive body image perceptions because it leaves women feeling strong and empowered. Crossfit's empowering nature does not just exist within the physical training domain but in the mental and psychological domain as well. More survey responses on pre-pregnancy body image perspectives such as: "Before diving into the whole pregnancy adventure, I was at the top of my game in CrossFit. My body felt like this unstoppable force – strong, fit, and just downright awesome. Every WOD was a victory. I loved my body!" revealed that body image among some of the participants was quite positive and indicated that involvement in sports is one of the major factors in boosting self-esteem and self-image. The athletes wrote about this sense of might, vigor, and dignity which arise because of the training they receive in CrossFit. One participant even mentioned that her body prior to pregnancy felt like a machine thanks to doing CrossFit: "Before pregnancy, my body felt like a machine. I was an athlete, and I felt proud and strong and beautiful. Doing CrossFit and staying active brought a sense of accomplishment. Sure, there were times I felt a bit tired or sore, but overall, it was defo a positive experience and my body felt great." This positive self-perception aligns with existing literature emphasizing the positive effects of exercise on body image (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). However, some of the participants mentioned that even though they loved their bodies thanks to Crossfit pre-pregnancy, they had a fear of putting on weight during the course of pregnancy. Even though they said that they wanted to continue the training

regimen they had before pregnancy in order not to gain too much weight, they mentioned they had some anxiety and often used the term ‘fear’ to describe their concern regarding weight gain. One participant wrote: "I loved my body so much before pregnancy; thanks to CrossFit, it was great. But as soon as I found out I am pregnant, there was this fear of gaining too much weight and losing my CrossFit body—you know, muscular and super fit—and I worked so hard on looking the way I did, so I did not want to lose it. I was really scared." Another participant mentioned: "Oh, everyone told me that I would become so fat and gain so much weight, so yes, there was this fear. But then I told them, 'Hell no, watch me train and be the most fit pregnant woman they know!'"

Recent findings from a systematic review by Gualdi-Russo et al. (2022) provide more insights into the effects of physical activity on body image perception among adolescents. The general conclusion that can be drawn from most of the 28 analyzed studies is that as physical activity increases, body image dissatisfaction decreases. While this review does not specifically pertain to CrossFit or pregnancy, it resonates with the experiences of many participants in this chapter. It implies that participating in activities such as CrossFit can help with self-perception and acceptance of the body. The positive feelings notwithstanding, a number of participants mentioned body image issues, which were frequently a consequence of more personal problems such as eating disorders. These results highlight the complex nature of body image in sport settings where social comparison and pressure to conform to perceived norms can impact how athletes perceive their bodies (Tiggemann, 2011). Another athlete's candid revelation about their struggles with self-doubt and comparison shed light on the pervasive pressure to meet unrealistic standards within the CrossFit community: "I felt like I was being pressured. CrossFit made me feel like I was always competing with someone and that I had to do more and look better." This response goes hand in hand with what another participant wrote: "I felt pretty confident in my body before pregnancy, but I did struggle with self-doubt and did think that my body was not doing good enough and looking good enough compared to other women in my CrossFit club." The self-doubt and comparison problems of the athletes in the CrossFit community resembled the findings of Laker and Walle's study (2020) on body comparison in adult women. Although their study did not focus on sports or pregnancy, they found out how comparison can harm body image. This means that the pressure to conform and the demerits of comparison are not confined to specific

circumstances. Following the ideas suggested by Laker and Walle, implementing interventions aimed at preventing such comparison behaviors may help women struggling with similar challenges in sports communities such as CrossFit. This is the reason why it is crucial to cultivate a healthy and positive environment that can be enjoyed by athletes without promoting the feeling of competition. Thus, understanding the negative impact of the comparison culture, this interpretation emphasizes the importance of creating an environment in the CrossFit community that would allow individuals to accept their body and achievements by appreciating their worth and performance without being guided by social norms and expectations.

Moreover, the introspective reflection of an athlete who acknowledged the complexity of their emotions—balancing moments of pride with lingering insecurities—underscored the multifaceted nature of the athletic journey: "Honestly, my feelings about my body during my athletic days were mixed. I tried my best, but I often felt like I was playing catch-up." This answer stressed that pursuing athletic goals requires acceptance of one's emotions and recognizing that there will be good and bad moments throughout the process. Thus, athletes, through acknowledging the layers of their feelings, are able to gain a better appreciation of themselves and the process, which safeguards them from being undone by the hardships that they may face. Furthermore, the introspection of an athlete who shared her journey from self-hatred to self-love offers a poignant testament to the transformative power of CrossFit in fostering personal growth and acceptance: "I used to hate my body when I was younger and of course had a terrible relationship with my body... However, I think around 6 years ago I started with fitness training and things got better."

This survey response revealed that CrossFit is not just another way to exercise—people experience the change on the personal level. Rather it is through CrossFit people do not only test their physical abilities but extend their perception of self and learn to accept the beauty of their bodies. The realistic responses of women about how they used to feel about their body image before pregnancy depict the real picture of what these participants went through. Their responses painted a picture of the spectrum of emotions ranging from contentment to discontent, painting the picture of the varied experiences in CrossFit. They spoke of the spirit

and determination of women who find hope and freedom in this sport, promoting acceptance and self-empowerment.

6.2.2 Influence of Comparison

Incorporating the findings of this survey with Social Comparison Theory sheds light on how pregnant CrossFit athletes manage body image shifts within their social environment. This study also revealed that these athletes often compared themselves to others in upward and downward comparisons, evaluating their changing bodies in relation to their peers. This is in accordance with Festinger's (1954) proposition that people have a tendency to compare themselves with others for the purpose of evaluating themselves and seeking social validation. Prior to getting pregnant, it was noted that most women who engage in CrossFit were trapped in the vicious cycle of competition. It could have been one of the greatest sources of motivation, but it also had its drawbacks. One athlete stated, "That was when I used to compete with other CrossFit girls, and it was a good thing because it motivated me to challenge myself. But it could also be bad at times because after a particularly grueling workout, I would feel like I was not measure up to the others." This showed that while comparison could be motivating, it could also lead to negative emotions such as feeling incompetent. Some of the participants mentioned that comparison was a struggle that they faced on a regular basis. Another athlete, for example, wrote the following: "I always had issues with comparing myself to others in CrossFit: the focus on physical strength triggered my past issues..." This was especially true because female CrossFit athletes often perform their workouts in sports clothing consisting of so-called booty shorts and sport bras, which only serves to draw even more attention to their bodies. In this respect, one respondent said, "It's just part of the CrossFit culture. Everyone compares themselves – whether it is their performance, strength or even how their bodies look."

Understanding that social comparison can be a source of support as well as a source of negative feelings can assist possible strategies in minimizing the negative outcomes of social comparison and maximizing positive experiences for the pregnant athletes within the CrossFit community. Thus, by expanding the understanding of the specific nature of social comparison within the CrossFit community, this study adds value to the development of Social Comparison Theory. In particular, survey results highlighted the importance of further

research on the nature of social comparison processes in the context of pregnancy. Future research could also examine the variables that may either enhance or dampen the positivity or negativity of social comparisons among pregnant athletes including the social support system, personal coping mechanisms, and cultural practices.

When considering survey findings, it is important to reflect on the limitations of Social Comparison Theory or how it could be enhanced in the future. In this study, several weaknesses of Social Comparison Theory in explaining the body image processes of the pregnant CrossFit athletes were identified. Despite the fact that the theory incorporates interpersonal comparisons, it fails to consider the individual and personal aspects of the process. For example, participants reported experiencing the pressure to meet the cultural standards of what it means to be a ‘good’ mother, which the theory does not capture. Furthermore, this study shows that social media comparisons also have an impact on body image, an aspect that is not captured well by the theory given that it is relatively old. The pregnant athletes also compared themselves to other athletes but also to influencers on social media, which also made them feel inadequate. Moreover, Social Comparison Theory omits the concept of intersectionality in comparison processes, which means that it does not explain how variables such as race and class influence body image perceptions. The participants, especially those from marginalized groups, faced different issues that were not discussed in the theory, stressing the importance of a more detailed approach within the athletic communities such as CrossFit.

6.3 Anticipation vs. Reality

6.3.1 The Influence of CrossFit on Body Image in Pregnancy

CrossFit impacted many women's body image before pregnancy by promoting empowerment through strength and functionality over appearance. While it boosted confidence for some, giving them strength during pregnancy, others experienced vanity and insecurity due to its focus on performance. For more details, see Section 7.1, particularly 7.1.1, already analyzed above in Results.

The onset of pregnancy added another level of complexity to this delicate relationship. In particular, many respondents faced difficulties in accepting the physical changes and

limitations during pregnancy. “Pregnancy affected me. It affected the way I saw myself, especially when the body started changing”, commented one of the athletes. Moving from the state of being active and physically fit to facing the realities of the physical body during pregnancy was not easy. “For me, exercise and CrossFit were my comfort zone before pregnancy, but pregnancy changed the way I looked at myself, my self-esteem, and self-concept,” as one of the participants pointed out, illustrating the emotional impact of this important life change. Some participants reported various concerns they had concerning their bodies and CrossFit during pregnancy. One participant said: “Yes, I had some expectations about how pregnancy affects my body image, how my body looks and feels as well as my true CrossFit self, but it was like walking blindfolded. You know, no one knows what to expect! I must admit, I was afraid that I will gain a lot of weight and that I will not be able to train as intensively anymore or that I will be weak and slow, and I will hate my body.” This revealed the fear and uncertainty that pregnant women often experience, especially in relation to maintaining their fitness routines. Another participant remarked on the gap between expectations and reality when she wrote: “Pregnancy expectations? Oh boy, I was totally wrong. Figured I would keep smashing my CrossFit workouts, stay as active as ever, love my body as always. Well, reality was totally different, and things didn’t work out like my optimistic self imagined and I ended up training just a little, being one third as active as I used to be maximum and the worst is that I definitely did not end up loving my body during pregnancy.” This perfectly reflects how the optimistic view on pregnancy and its impact on a woman’s body and daily routine is not always in harmony with the actual experience.

6.3.2 Physical and Emotional Impact of Pregnancy on Body Image

Pregnancy as a journey led to both physical changes as well as changes in the emotional well-being of the women and how they saw their bodies. A number of respondents were challenged by trying to balance their previous fitness and expectations of body image before pregnancy with the changes that pregnancy brings. Pregnancy was described as a rollercoaster of emotions, with moments of joy and uncertainty: “Pregnancy was a whirlwind, completely changing my view of my body,” one respondent wrote, summarizing the sentiments of many respondents. For some, it was the physical changes that were rather difficult to come to terms with. One of the participants’ experiences included: “Pregnancy affected my body image in

various ways; every trimester came with its own challenges and fears, such as loosing my muscles in the second trimester” one woman wrote. The deterioration of muscle mass and the evident changes in their bodies led to feelings of helplessness and anger. Another respondent described pregnancy as an exciting journey but with some difficult days: “Pregnancy was an emotional rollercoaster. While some days felt amazing, others were tough to navigate. But it was all part of the journey,” she wrote.

These physical changes had a profound effect on the emotions of the participants. A lot of women described feeling of disconnection from their body, as they felt betrayed by their own body which changed on them without consent. “I never expected that pregnancy would make me feel so emotional. I felt like I was losing myself with every change,” wrote one respondent. This feeling of disconnection was echoed by many, and several women stated that their bodies are no longer their own. Nevertheless, there were instances of deep interpersonal connection and positive body image amidst the identified barriers. Feeling their baby move and grow brought about a new meaning to their body and a sense of pride. “Pregnancy brought major changes, and some of them were rather sensitive; still, feeling the baby inside me and growing, I developed a new appreciation for my body,” one of the respondents wrote. These instances of connection provided direction to many women in terms of how they navigated the emotional roller coaster of pregnancy and developing a healthier body image.

6.3.3 Influence of Comparison in Pregnancy

As pregnancy progressed, many participants found themselves engaging in more frequent comparisons, both with other pregnant women and with their pre-pregnancy selves. “I was already thinking about comparisons before, and then I thought okay, now I am pregnant I do not care about others and how I am doing compared to them, but I was so wrong. Pregnancy really brought out the worst in me,” explained one athlete. And as their bodies transformed in ways they could not control, the desire to compete with others – within the confines of the gym or with their previous selves – grew stronger. This change made a lot of people start to question what was actually important when it came to fitness.

The following may be used to explain why women during pregnancy are more conscious of comparisons than in other occasions; Women’s bodies undergo rapid and involuntary

transformations during pregnancy. Such transformations disrupt conventional perceptions of slimness and body acceptance, forcing females into a process of competition. One of the respondents remembered that she was constantly comparing herself to other pregnant women that she used to do CrossFit with: “I really don’t understand why I did that, but I couldn’t help it. Maybe I was just trying to prove myself that pregnancy can’t stop me or that I am still good enough?” This illustrates that the desire to continue to present oneself as unhindered by physical changes can make a woman compare herself to others, even when they recognize the futility or irrationality of such comparisons.

On the other hand, pregnancy is also a process that opens opportunities to change priorities and perception in a more positive manner. One of the respondents wrote: “Once I realized that I am pregnant I don’t bother how I perform, how I look compared to other women – those that I used to compare myself with before pregnancy! It just clicked and I didn’t care anymore.” This illustrates that pregnancy may lead some women to redefine their values, and although they might have previously been obsessed with comparing themselves to others, pregnancy helps them to break free of this obsession.

These experiences demonstrate the multifaceted and personal journey of how pregnancy affects the body image and the self. For some, pregnancy brings changes in comparison schemas, increasing the pressure to compete and compare with others and making feelings of inadequacy worse. As for others, the same changes cause a reflection of what is really essential in life and result in a healthier and accepting attitude towards oneself. This duality is important in ensuring that women are able to go through these comparisons in a manner that will enable them get the necessary support they require when they are pregnant physically and emotionally.

6.3.4 Key Moments and Phases During Pregnancy

There are some stages of pregnancy that trigger significant changes in the way women perceive their bodies. In the first few months, there is a sense of the familiar since no major physical alterations are evident. For instance, one athlete wrote, “During the first trimester, I felt like myself since my pregnancy was not noticeable.” However, as pregnancies progress and physical changes occur, emotional issues emerge. One participant summed up the feeling of many respondents: “By the seventh month, I just wanted to get back to my normal size

and my normal body,” she wrote, “I did not expect that I will feel like this.” Many of the participants seemed to agree with this statement, as they employed phrases such as “I did not expect this” or “I was not prepared for this” when completing their surveys.

Many respondents wrote that their inability to continue exercising at the same level as before pregnancy was frustrating. One of the women wrote, “During the eighth and ninth months, I could hardly move from the bed and max train once-twice a week, and this was very frustrating for me since I was once an active person who exercised five to seven days per week.” This rapid shift from a high level of activity to a low level of activity caused many participants to feel frustrated and useless. It is also important to note the emotional consequences of these changes. Tensions and people’s outbursts of passion were on the rise. This was illustrated by one respondent who wrote, “Emotions always magnified everything; even if I gained a few pounds, during the early weeks of pregnancy I would cry.” The combination of physical changes and strong emotions often resulted in episodes of self-confidence crises and concerns about the body shape after childbirth. Other women wrote, “There were moments of real concern—what if pregnancy changes my body forever? What if I don’t get my body back to the way it was before? I did not expect this!”

Many participants reported that their pregnancy experiences differed significantly from their expectations and preparations. These women experienced various unexpected and surprising characteristics related to their body image. This led to different degrees of emotional hardship and struggles with adjusting where common themes included unexpected physical setbacks, heightened emotional intensity and struggles with their body image getting worse. A high number of participants expressed that the degree of these changes surprised them. Particularly with the emotional toll it took on their mental well-being. Furthermore, comparing their experiences to social norms and others’ expectations was an important factor influencing participants’ body image perceptions during pregnancy. Faced with personalized body image changes that they did not anticipate, the contrast between the perceived reality and the expected one frequently led to negative emotions, and self-doubt. In brief, the congruence between pregnancy expectations and experiences was different among the participants. The experiences of some participants coincided with their expectations, which is a sign of good

readiness and realistic anticipation, while others experienced unexpected changes that affected their emotional stability and perceptions of the body image.

In the middle of these tribulations, positive experiences of physical connection and happiness appeared that helped the women embrace their bodies. This statement from one of the respondents reflects the sentiments of many expectant mothers where one said, “Feeling my baby move gave me a newfound appreciation for my body.” These instances of connection also worked as support systems counteracting the difficulties of pregnancy and cultivating a deep respect for one’s body functions.

6.4 Copying Mechanisms

Integrating the survey findings with Coping Theory revealed how the participants managed the various challenges associated with body image in connection to pregnancy. Adapting to all the changes that pregnancy brings can be quite a whirlwind and therefore, many women need a variety of ways on how to cope with these changes. In particular, for many expecting mothers, it is very helpful to draw support from various sources. The partners, family, friends, and even the online communities become the essential sources of discussions, validation, understanding, and support. For instance, one of the respondents wrote: “My support crew, my husband, my girlfriends, my CrossFit team and coach as well setting realistic expectations and self-care were my best strategies.” Another respondent wrote: “My CrossFit girlfriends, our gym community and also the online CrossFit community was a constant source of help.”

Additionally, labeling social support as one of the copying mechanisms adapted was highlighted by many other participants. They stated that they want to get advice on how to deal with their body image challenges as well as support, and stories from other athletes, coaches, and even online communities. This collective support system acted as a coping resource that offered athletes encouragement, support, and a feeling of being accepted. Although Coping Theory focuses on individual appraisals and coping mechanisms, the survey answers show that social support and community cohesion played a crucial role in the coping processes of the pregnant CrossFit athletes. In contrast to the traditional approach that focuses on the ways in which people cope independently, the current study highlights the communal aspects of coping in the CrossFit culture whereby athletes turn to their peers for

encouragement, help, and stories. Hence, it is crucial to take into account the social factors and the support systems in Coping Theory. Rather than concentrating on the specific ways of coping, Coping Theory may be more useful if it took into consideration the fact that coping is often a group process in athletic subcultures such as CrossFit.

Despite the changes in the physical environment, developing positive ways of thinking or positive reframing became a major way of coping. Participants concentrated their attention on perceiving these changes as temporary; and dreaming of the day they will be able to welcome a new born baby, in spite of the issues of body image. This can be illustrated by the following response from one of the respondents: “Just imagining me holding my baby! I did not really think about how fat I looked during pregnancy”, this shows how the idea of holding the baby to be born can act as a shift in attention. Another common coping strategy was the acceptance of the pregnancy, as well as all the physical changes that go along with it. One of the respondents mentioned, “This brought out the coping with the body changes during pregnancy as I had to embrace everything – the stretch marks, the curves. It was about loving myself through it all,” which shows the essence of self-acceptance and self-love. Some of the participants also looked for professional assistance in order to cope with the complexity of the changes in body image. Counseling and therapy were some of the therapeutic interventions that offered patients an opportunity to express their feelings and build coping mechanisms against adversities. The following is an example of the need for professional help: “Coping was stepping back—harder than any workout ever before. I ended up finding a therapist who works with people who struggle with body changes and body image.” Self-care and exercising are some of the ways that can be used to control psychological and emotional health during pregnancy. From prenatal yoga to modified workouts created for a changing body, many pregnant women get comfort and confidence from physical activity. For instance, one of the respondents noted, “To deal with changes in body image during pregnancy, I chose to do prenatal yoga and low impact exercises that were appropriate for the changing body,” implying how physical activity plays a positive role in enhancing body image. These responses show that coping strategies applied by the participants were not limited to problem-focused and emotion-focused approaches, which shows that coping among pregnant athletes is flexible. Besides, the participants sought professional assistance or used distraction strategies, and they also used physical activities like modified workouts

or prenatal yoga to manage body image issues. This integration of coping strategies with physical activity shows that the coping strategy of the pregnant CrossFit athletes is more comprehensive where exercise is not only a form of coping but also a form of strength. These findings imply that Coping Theory may need to extend the categorization of coping mechanisms to cover a wider set of approaches than just problem-focused and emotion-focused ones.

Additionally, finding enjoyable and fulfilling activities like reading, watching TV shows, spending time with family and friends, and doing hobbies indeed help to shift focus away from pregnancy-related body image concerns. Thus, turning to these pleasant thoughts and experiences, many get a break from their worries. The following is an example of one respondent's coping response: "Coping was hard. What used to work did not work this time. Only family, books on pregnancy, and mental strength could help." The culture of self-reflection and being present was also identified as helpful in managing the pregnancy-associated changes in body image. The participants acknowledged the emotional process of the intervention, enabling them to develop self-awareness and coping strategies. One of the respondents pointed out that the strategies she applied were based on the principles of self-love and self-care: "Taking moments of quiet for myself became my coping strategies"; here, the respondent underlines the importance of introspection in accepting oneself and being kind to oneself.

Having reviewed all the survey responses, I can now say that I do recall instances in the past where these coping strategies were used and reported by pregnant athletes at the CrossFit gym where I train throughout the years. Women often mentioned the use of activities that provide joy and contentment, including reading, watching TV programs, spending time with friends and family, and exploring interests. These activities were often cited as helpful in diverting attention away from the difficulties of pregnancy-related body image issues, which is consistent with the survey findings.

6.5 Factors Influencing Experience

6.5.1 Aligning Pregnancy Expectations

Based on the survey responses, expectation tends to depict pregnancy as a mere extension of energy and strength, particularly for those who are dedicated CrossFitters. The desire to stay fit and keep a positive body image as a mother is another factor that drives women. However, the realities of pregnancy are somewhat different and offer a rather different picture, where expectations intersect with the physical and emotional changes that come with pregnancy.

Largely focusing on strength, functionality, and empowering individuals, CrossFit, in its history, contributes to the development of a healthy attitude towards one's body image. Before pregnancy, women are able to gain confidence from the exercising hence they get comfort from the physical fitness rather than the looks. However, when pregnancy occurs, this relationship between body image and athleticism is further complicated. Pregnancy is a process that brings significant physiological and psychological changes in women. The initial dream of maintaining one's fitness and a positive body image dissipates and is replaced by the consequences of physical limitations and changes in one's body. One participant summed it up best by writing, "Pregnancy affected me. It altered how I perceived myself, especially as my body began to change." The transition from being a fit and active athlete to grappling with pregnancy challenges is not an easy one. The dissonance between expectations and realities becomes evident, as one athlete noted, "I was totally wrong. Reality was starkly different, and things didn't unfold as my optimistic self imagined." Comparison also adds another layer to the management of this tension between anticipation and the actual experience. Many pregnant athletes are in a dilemma when it comes to comparing themselves with other athletes in their Crossfit community and even their past pre-pregnancy selves. The urge to sustain the performance levels and looks during fast and undesired changes can increase pressure and contribute to feelings of inadequacy.

However, in the middle of these struggles, glimmers of hope and growth and exploration of own identity exist. Some athletes accept pregnancy as a new role and new challenges, motivate themselves and even change priorities, realizing that they need self-acceptance. As

one participant reflected on her thoughts, "Once I realized I was pregnant, I stopped worrying about performance or how I compared to others. It just clicked, and I didn't care anymore."

6.5.2 Finding Positivity Amidst Body Image Changes

Pregnancy has many difficulties, and to overcome them, it is necessary to use different approaches and coping mechanisms such as social support, self-care, and the presence of a positive outlook. Responses gathered from the survey revealed various aspects of how pregnant athletes stayed positive despite changes in their body image. Some of the women mentioned that social support and community solidarity is crucial in fostering resilience during pregnancy. One respondent expressed profound gratitude, writing: "My fellow expecting ladies made me so happy - God bless our preggo CrossFit classes and my gym for actually organizing them! It was my safe place and best 1 hour of my day at that point!" Additionally, one of the respondents was very grateful for the fact that there were others who were sharing similar experiences, stating: "Having a supportive community and made all the difference. Knowing that others were going through the same thing helped me stay positive." These findings are in line with those of Prewitt-White et al. (2018) who also found that social support and community cohesion plays a crucial role in ensuring that pregnant athletes remain active. This is consistent with this research on the important function of the CrossFit community as a source of support and shared experiences in pregnancy. This is because being in a supportive sports community like CrossFit, the pregnant woman cannot be discouraged by negative body image thoughts and can thus continue to exercise during the pregnancy.

Similarly, the qualitative systematic review conducted by Al-Mutawtah et al. (2023) provides insights into women's experiences of social support during pregnancy, which is quite diverse and comes from various sources, including family, friends, partners and communities. The survey results are in accordance with these findings, underlining the importance of the social support networks, especially within the sport communities such as CrossFit, in enhancing the positive thinking of pregnant women. Hence, it is necessary to acknowledge that, while Al-Mutawtah et al.'s study offers valuable insights into the emotional support received by pregnant women, the authors do not discuss the role of sport communities, including CrossFit, in supporting women during pregnancy.

Also, some of the women expressed the importance of practicing self-care and protecting one's mental health during pregnancy. For instance, one of the participants wrote: "Listening to myself and focusing on my mental health was crucial in staying positive." This underscores the role of self-care and being mindful during pregnancy. Furthermore, several respondents based their attention on the end goal and were able to have fun in the process of creating life. Specifically, one respondent wrote, "It kept me positive because I was only concentrating on the baby as well as the wonderful experience of pregnancy." A respondent echoed this sentiment by stating, "I chose to remain positive and concentrate on the baby and the miracle of pregnancy as I went through various new challenges." This shows how perceiving challenges as opportunities can be empowering. Hence, it can be concluded that positive thinking during pregnancy is a complex concept that encompasses social support, self-care, and positive attitudes towards pregnancy, and with the help of the community, practicing self-care and self-love, and embracing the journey, women are capable of going through the process of pregnancy with resilience and empowerment.

6.5.3 Varied Perspectives on Body Image Changes

Participants were asked to reflect on their observations of fellow pregnant CrossFit athletes and whether they noticed differences in how these women maintained a positive outlook about their body image changes during pregnancy. Their perceptions reveal that every woman is a different human being, and they cope with the burdens of pregnancy in their own ways. Several respondents also pointed out that observing how other moms-to-be dealt with their bodies' transformations proved helpful. This is illustrated by the statement of one of the participants who wrote, "People I knew experienced some somehow unpleasant body image changes, but they were all looking forward to the future and meeting their babies. This helped me to remain positive." This demonstrates how women can be encouraged to remain positive by focusing on the importance of pregnancy and the joy of holding a baby in the future. However, not all participants shared similar sentiments towards this change. Some of the women mentioned that they experienced loneliness and disappointment regarding their body image compared to their peers. One of the respondents wrote, "I was suffering, it seemed everyone else was handling it well. Their behavior was different from how I felt. I felt like I

was the only one going through it.” This depicts the need to accept that everyone experiences pregnancy differently.

Also, athletes observed that competitive and non-competitive attitudes influenced how they viewed their body transformation. One of the respondents noted, “It seems like those who CrossFit for leisure and those who do not compete are okay with body changes because they think it is normal for a pregnant woman and beneficial for the baby. But it is different for competing athletes because it is more noticeable and they have different perceptions of it.” This shows how personal motives and expectations affect the perception of pregnant athletes. Thus, the reflections of the participants help us to see how pregnant CrossFit athletes stay positive despite body image changes. Athletes should indeed understand and appreciate each other’s experience in order to foster a positive environment that embraces pregnancy as part of individuals' journeys.

6.5.4 Navigating Body Image Changes with Resilience and Compassion

As for the changes in body image during pregnancy, athletes shared invaluable advice for pregnant CrossFit athletes based on their own experiences. Participants’ experiences revealed the importance of having resilience, self-compassion, and support from friends and family in order to have a positive outlook regarding pregnancy and its body image related challenges. Some participants pointed to the fact that an ability to be resilient and adjust to change is the key in relation to body image changes. Another respondent gives a piece of advice: “Prepare yourself for the unexpected! Do not expect to be able to train or maintain your pre-pregnancy physique—it’s just not possible! Your body will change and with that your body image most probably as well!” This understanding of pregnancy as a period of unpredictable change emphasizes the importance of accepting changes and adapting to them with determination. In addition, athletes also highlighted the importance of focusing on the mental health and if need be, seeking help from other people. For instance, one participant noted, “Listen to your body and be active as you feel, not as others expect you to be... Be surrounded with people who will believe you...” This emphasis on self-compassion and community support shows how solidarity can be empowering when it comes to managing pregnancy difficulties. Also, participants urged fellow athletes to have a broader perspective and be happy with the process of bringing new life into the world. For instance, one woman wrote,

“Remember your baby! Pregnancy is such a wonderful thing!” This call to focus on the baby underlines the positive changes that occur during pregnancy and the ability to turn difficulties into something positive. Besides, the orientation towards personalized approaches and integral health points out the importance of self-care and resilience building for pregnant sportswomen. Such results add to the knowledge of the intricate interaction between personal factors and social processes in determining body image attitudes in pregnancy (Rodgers et al., 2024).

Considering the variety of diverse experiences shared by athletes, one can conclude that the process of managing changes in body image during pregnancy is a deeply personal journey. Yet, there are some patterns that can be identified in the stories of the women, such as perseverance, kindness to oneself, and support from others. These pieces of advice are the light for fellow pregnant CrossFit athletes: Accepting change as a part of life, taking care of their mental health, and enjoying the process of creating a new life. These athletes show great courage and endurance despite the challenges that accompany pregnancy by pulling strength from within and the support of their community. They also empower each other throughout the process, ensuring that each woman’s path is recognized, and she is encouraged to continue moving forward.

6.6 Summary

The main question addressed in this thesis is: How do dedicated CrossFit athletes perceive and experience changes in their body image surrounding pregnancy? The specific aim outlined in the thesis Research Aim was to explore how pregnancy impacts the body image of dedicated female CrossFit athletes in Denmark. Techniques employed to address these aims included qualitative survey analysis, thematic categorization of responses, and theoretical integration. The answer to the main question reveals a nuanced understanding of how athletic engagement intersects with pregnancy experiences to shape individuals' perceptions of self and body image. The contributions to knowledge by this study are numerous and original. To begin with, it enlightens us on the difficult interaction among body image perceptions, pregnancy experiences and athletic involvement in the CrossFit community. This area was not deeply investigated before. The literature review on body image in pregnancy underscores the complex nature of this phenomenon, which is affected

by societal pressure and individual perception. Research of Borodulin et al. (2008) and Gaston and Cramp (2011) in the exercise patterns during pregnancy give a thorough context of the body image experiences of CrossFit athletes. Second, the study offers a special view of the expecting and the reality of body image alteration during pregnancy among CrossFit athletes, presenting different strategies of coping with physical and emotional changes by the subjects. Insights from Raspovic et al. (2021) regarding postnatal exercise behaviors and Erkaya et al. (2018) exploration of maternal obesity provide additional context for understanding how pregnancy and postpartum experiences intersect with body image perceptions. Thirdly, the research outlines adaptive coping mechanisms used by the pregnant athletes to cope with body image problems, emphasizing on social support, self-care behaviors, and psychological resilience. Research by Muktabhant et al. (2015) on weight management during pregnancy and Perales et al.'s (2017) emphasis on the broader implications of exercise during pregnancy contribute to understanding of the coping mechanisms employed by CrossFit athletes.

Additionally, in line with the research of Zaccagni and Gualdi-Russo, this study shows that participation in sports, among which CrossFit, has an effect on self-esteem and self-image, leading to favorable pre-pregnancy body image perceptions. Nevertheless, the body image issues that the athletes in their study faced, were the same that participants in this research also encountered, often affected by personal obstacles and societal pressures, emphasizing the complex nature of body image perceptions in athletic communities. Moreover, the article by Swami et al. (2009) addresses the issue of the variability of body size ideals, body dissatisfaction, and media influence in female athletes and non-athletes. Although their work is not focused specifically on pregnancy or sports participation during pregnancy, it provides valuable data on the impact of sports activities on body image perceptions. This corresponds with the results of this research, which demonstrate the influence of sports activity, especially CrossFit, on the body image perceptions of pregnant athletes. Furthermore, Köteles et al. (2016) study delivers details of psychological components of CrossFit training such as training frequency and its impact on everyday psychological functioning of individuals. Their findings contribute to the research of psychological benefits of exercise, such that such high-intensity training modalities as CrossFit can have favorable effects on people's mental health. This is in tune with the attention of this study on body image perceptions among CrossFit

athletes, as it underscores the general psychological advantages of participating in CrossFit training. What is more, the study of Podmore and Ogle (2018) is consistent with this study's results, emphasizing the complicated relationship between engagement in CrossFit and body image perceptions. Likewise, this study highlights the ways CrossFit pregnant athletes' experiences are connected with their body image expectations and management tactics. Both of these studies highlight the need to understand how involvement in CrossFit activities defines people's body perceptions, emphasizing the applicability of such insights to the development of positive body image changes in the CrossFit community.

In a nutshell, this thesis provides an extensive examination of body image perceptions in dedicated CrossFit athletes pre and during pregnancy. The new findings of the study help in getting a deeper picture of the way individuals go through physical and emotional changes within the CrossFit community. In the end, this research emphasizes holistic support and individualized interventions as essential to the development of a positive body image and physical well-being in pregnant athletes.

7. Discussion of ethical, scientific, and social considerations

The rationale for placing the considerations chapter after the findings stems from the desire to offer a comprehensive and reflective analysis of the research process and its results. This is because the chapter on discussion of findings is positioned immediately after the presentation of findings thus creating a clear distinction between the empirical data presented and the subsequent ethical, scientific, and social considerations. Due to this, the readers are a position to gain a better understanding of the research outcomes through the findings before delving into the ethical, methodological, and societal considerations highlighted in the considerations chapter. Additionally, by placing these reflections after the findings, the chapter also provides a means of reflecting on the research process and responding to any ethical issues that emerged during the study and also considering the implications of the findings within appropriate contexts. The above sequence also creates a systematic and logical flow that contributes to the improvement of the quality and effectiveness of the research findings.

7.1 Ethical Considerations

In the context of ethical considerations for my study, I addressed several key factors. At the start, the main concern was on obtaining an informed consent that emphasizes on provision of comprehensive details on the objectives of the study, methodologies, possible risks and benefits (Gratton & Jones, 2010). This method focuses on openness and honors one's autonomy. After this, the participants were asked to give voluntary consent of participation after they have read the provided information, thus making the process ethical. I also strictly observed confidentiality and anonymity during the research process by developing an anonymous online survey and protecting gym names. I password-protected all digital files that have sensitive information, thereby, increasing security. The data collection was done through a safe online survey platform with the use of encrypted server, and the data that was collected is solely mine. The protection of the vulnerable participants was my main focus which was achieved through communication of the available support services and facilities.

Transparency of reporting was ensured through detailed description of the methodology, the analysis, and the changes made in the research plan.

In order to improve the ethical concerns of the study, I made sure that the informed consent process used lay language which was easy for the participants from diverse backgrounds to understand. To allow people with different levels of literacy to access the informed consent materials simplification of the language used was necessary. The consent form said the participant understood and chose to take part in the survey. It explained what the study was about, how their information would be kept private, and that they could quit the survey anytime without any issues. With the use of simple language and provision of comprehensive instructions, participants were enabled to make informed choices on whether to participate in the research, hence, upholding ethical principles of transparency and autonomy. This method encourages inclusion and ensures that all the participants are properly informed and able to voluntarily participate, irrespective of their literacy level or background. Moreover, preventive strategies were put in place to deal with any language or literacy barriers that participants may face during consent. Hence, simple language was used for the whole online survey, so that people would access the material easily and efficiently. In addition, continuous attempts to monitor and assess the efficiency of confidentiality and anonymity protocols have been implemented. I sought opinions from colleagues or fellow students who were versed with research ethics as well as confidentiality. They exchanged useful ideas and considerations in order to show if any issues or threats existed. Particularly, I attended three meetings along with other master's students to talk about ethics and remake the confidentiality processes due to what was pointed out. These efforts ensured that the confidentiality and anonymity measures remained effective and aligned with ethical standards throughout the research process. Additionally, I arranged separate sessions of literature on research ethics for myself. More precisely, I arranged special weekly sessions that concentrated on research ethics (Oliver, 2010; Mustajoki & Mustajoki, 2017; Knight, 2002). These readings gave me as the researcher important points and discussions on ethical issues in research, thereby enhanced the comprehension and implementation of ethical principles in this research. The methodology documentation and any changes in the research plan were improved by integrating comprehensive rationales into the documentation. Given the limitations of this project, I worked on the optimization of the documentation process, by

placing the explanations of methodological decisions in the sections of the research plan and methodology documentation where they are relevant. This method made the documentation process very easy but at the same time provided the needed transparency and accountability. With the inclusion of detailed rationales within the current documents, I made sure that the logic behind every decision was easily available, and well explained improving the whole quality of the documentation.

7.2 Social Considerations

It is necessary to consider several social considerations that may have affected the experiences of pregnant dedicated athletes within the CrossFit community. Despite the goal of this study to offer insights into the pregnancy experiences of dedicated athletes, it is important to note that certain socio-demographic characteristics, including opportunities to train CrossFit in Copenhagen, could affect the degree of support available to individuals. It is possible people who could afford CrossFit membership in Copenhagen were a more privileged population and, as a result, had a stronger support system provided to them during their pregnancies. Moreover, cultural influences and motives to begin CrossFit might also have contributed to the participants' perceptions and experiences. For instance, the perception that most Danish women may have regarding their body image may not be the same as the perception that most women from Nigeria may have due to cultural differences. Likewise, the reason for starting CrossFit could be for fun, improved nutrition, or weight loss, and it might influence one's attitude and outlook on pregnancy in CrossFit culture. Future research could extend this investigation of the socio-cultural influences on pregnancy experiences to more broadly incorporate the experiences of other CrossFit participants beyond the dedicated athletes that were the subjects of this study.

Furthermore, this research aimed to investigate the social dynamics of pregnancy experiences of elite athletes within the CrossFit community and promote positive and supportive societal attitudes. At the heart of this endeavor lay the empowerment and representation of participants. The study sought to fight stigma and question the stereotypes by providing a detailed picture of different pregnancy experiences of dedicated athletes in CrossFit. The dissemination of research findings that highlighted these different stories aimed to dispel these stereotypes and encourage a more inclusive environment in the CrossFit community.

Conforming to general attempts to support the idea of gender equality in sport, this research focused on the particular questions of women athletes and their pregnancies. Through the tactical distribution of results, the study intended to participate in the current debate concerning gender equity in sporting activities, advocating for the fact that pregnant and postpartum athletes were not given a proper place and support within the sport field.

Upon the completion of the study, the participation for presentation of the research results to CrossFit gyms where the invitations were placed was offered. The aim was to give and show the thesis results to these gyms and make sure that they received a complete picture on the experience of their members. This initiative aimed at providing gyms with the know-how to properly help and aid their members whenever they may need such help. Facilitated by this exchange, the study aimed to create a supportive and sympathetic atmosphere within the CrossFit community, which resulted in a more inclusive and fair sports environment. Additionally, when the study was completed and the thesis was defended, a number of CrossFit related mediums and communities – mainly, social media groups and sites, were contacted. The goal was to provide an opportunity to disseminate the results of the thesis to the larger CrossFit community. This outreach initiative may have included arranging presentations or workshops at various CrossFit gyms, communities, or in the online space to talk about the research findings and their implications for the community. Moreover, the ability to provide electronic or printed reports or summaries of the research findings for stakeholders was available. Through active interaction with various stakeholders within the CrossFit community, such as athletes, coaches, and gym owners, during research and subsequently disseminating the research outcomes to them, the relevancy and potential impact of the research within the social context were ensured. This method allowed reaching the information and encouraged dialogue within the community, thus, leading to a better understanding of the pregnancy experiences of dedicated athletes in CrossFit.

7.3 Scientific Considerations

This study was based on a scientific method that aimed at ensuring that each part of it was carefully formulated in order to preserve the truth and reliability of the outcomes. First, the choice of an online qualitative survey method was purposive due to the constraints of participants involved. Although this approach had some limitations, for instance possible

response biases and a lack of control of data quality, it was fitting because it provided an efficient means to collect a range of views from a widely spread group. This technique ensured that the investigation covered a thorough picture of the lives of CrossFit athletes, including their obstacles, stimulations, and attitudes. The participant selection criteria were well defined so that the sample was a good representative of the research objectives. The methodology used for the data analysis was a systematic thematic analysis approach that provided a balance between structure and flexibility in extracting relevant themes from participant narratives. Validity and reliability were maintained by clear survey instructions, questions that were worded precisely, and the use of sound analysis methods which included coding and thematic analysis. Recognizing the potential impact of researcher biases, transparency was upheld in every part of the study. My part and possible influence on the data gathering and analysis were voluntarily confessed, which made the research process more critically evaluated. Moreover, comprehensive peer review by other master's degree students reinforced the conclusion, and consequently, the reliability and validity of the study. In addition, the research openly admitted to its weaknesses, which covered possible self-reported data biases and the limitations of the online survey format. They were minimized to the extent that was feasible, thus enabling the research to retain its scientific validity and to provide valuable information on the settings that participants in CrossFit contests faced.

7.3.1 Survey Responses Evaluation

As I waded into the qualitative phase of this study, I could not shake this worry I had. My biggest fear and challenge were that maybe the responses I would get would be too short or shallow, such as quantitative survey responses are. Especially considering I was delving into something as personal as pregnant athletes' body image in Denmark. But then, something happened that really struck a chord with me. During recruitment, one of the potential participants told me that as much as she wanted to join the research and be a participant for a qualitative interview, managing two little ones made it practically impossible. That conversation affected me. It reminded me that research is not just about data points; it is about understanding real-life situations and listening to research participants. So, with this newfound perspective, I dove into the qualitative phase and created a qualitative survey. And I must admit - I was pleasantly surprised. The responses I received were not just answers;

they were stories. Stories about adjusting workouts, embracing changes, and riding the emotional rollercoaster of pregnancy. As I read the data, it became clear that my initial worries were unfounded. These responses were pure qualitative gold. They gave me an intimate glimpse into the lives of dedicated CrossFit athletes in Denmark navigating pregnancy. Therefore, the paragraph that follows is a deep dive into those stories. It us about capturing the essence of the participants' experiences, emotions, and insights. In essence, this journey taught me that research is not just about following the outdated rules and recommendations. It is about honoring the voices and experiences of the participants. And through their stories, I gain invaluable insights into this research topic.

The qualitative phase had 41 respondents and all of them met the eligibility criteria and agreed to take part in the study. None of the respondents recorded any complaint or comment during the survey in relation to any question asked, thus showing that ethical research standards were followed strictly. To clarify, in order to avoid any form of harm or stress to the respondents, they were asked to indicate any question that made them feel uncomfortable or stressed. The responses were analyzed in detail in order to obtain as comprehensive view of participant's' perception as possible. Consequently, the transcripts turned into a rather huge document that went through about 52 pages. This attention to detail meant that every part of the participants' experiences was accurately recorded and saved for further analysis. The participants did not just give facts but rather insightful information in terms of their emotional conditions and life experiences, especially their athletic journey before pregnancy, and what they expected during pregnancy related to their bodily transformation. The responses were complete, and it showed the high-level engagement and interest in the subject matter. The participants expressed their thoughts, concerns, and hopes with an impressive level of detail which enriched the data that researchers would have in order to investigate and analyze the different factors. In addition, the diversity of language and phrases employed by participants reiterated the diversity of perspectives in the sample. At the same time, this variety not only increased the reliability and validity of the results, but also made qualitative data more multi-voiced, what ensured a detailed understanding of the investigated phenomena.

One respondent expressed, "I expected changes during pregnancy, but I aimed to maintain a level of fitness. I thought about adjusting my workout routine and being mindful of nutrition.

The expectation was to stay active and healthy while embracing the natural transformations that come with pregnancy." It is not only a factual reply; this participant is sharing her personal experience. The active effort of the participant in order to keep her health throughout her pregnancy period is revealed. This respondent discusses the alterations she is doing in her lifestyle and how crucial is for her to give priority to herself. Such detail provides us a better insight into participant's journey and emotions. Another respondent shared, "Before pregnancy, my body felt like this unstoppable force – strong, fit, and just downright awesome. Every WOD was a victory. I loved my body." Such statement not only describes the state of feeling strong and fit, but also expresses the strong emotional bond with the body, which the respondent experienced in the course of the athletic journey until the pregnancy. It adds information about the emotional state of empowerment and happiness felt at that moment, thus, providing the dataset with a narrative of victory and confidence.

To summarize, qualitative survey responses manifested the theory of qualitative research which means that these responses, provided by the participants, were comprehensive, detailed and quite emotional; they were the experiences, feelings, perceptions that participants felt in respect to the research question. Their narratives offered insights that add to a better appreciation of the intricacies involved in the pregnant related body image topic.

7.3.2 Refinement of Research Aim and Main Question

Finally, it is important to note that during the conduct of this research, a slight change to the research aim and the main research question was made. At first, the aim was to explore and discuss the discrepancy between the expectations of the female CrossFit athletes regarding their pre-pregnancy body image and their real pregnancy experiences. But as the study progressed, I realized that focusing on how pregnancy influences the body image of these athletes would provide more comprehensive insights. Therefore, the new aim was to explore how pregnancy impacts the body image of dedicated female CrossFit athletes in Denmark. Therefore, the main research question changed from the examination of the alignment between the pre-pregnancy body image expectations and real pregnancy experiences to discovering how dedicated CrossFit athletes in Denmark perceive and experience changes in their body image surrounding pregnancy. Such a change enhanced a broader and more comprehensive analysis of the provided subject matter with a more refined perception of the

athlete's account. The specific sub-questions did not change throughout the study; they continued to provide attention to both expectation before pregnancy and contrast with experience. This change was aimed at increasing the richness and significance of the study, thereby making its results more significant and realistic.

8. Limitations

Although this study provided useful findings about body image perceptions in dedicated female CrossFit athletes before and during pregnancy, a number of limitations should be recognized.

This study is limited by the fact that the participants were recruited solely from different CrossFit communities in Copenhagen, which may limit the representativeness of the broader population of female CrossFit athletes. Therefore, the findings should be taken judiciously in case of transferring them to other settings or populations. Another possible restriction concerns that all the reports were collected through self-report surveys. Self-report measures are sensitive to bias, social desirability bias and recall bias being the main examples (Oliver, 2010). Participants might have given answers, which they thought were socially acceptable. While efforts were made to mitigate these biases through anonymity and confidentiality, the possibility of biased responses cannot be entirely eliminated.

This study was based mainly on cross-sectional data, which limits the possibility of tracking changes in body image perceptions over time. Therefore, participants might have remembered their experiences incorrectly as time passed since they experienced pregnancy. Had longitudinal data collection been done, a better idea of the evolution of body image throughout the different stages of pregnancy and postpartum would have been obtained. The scope of this study was aimed at body image perceptions among female CrossFit athletes during pregnancy in terms of pre-pregnancy body image, expectations, coping mechanisms, and alignment with reality. Though these variables are relevant, other factors that might impact on body image perceptions, including socio-economic status, cultural background, and individual personality traits, were not examined in depth. Further studies would do well to look deeper into these variables in order to produce a more rounded picture of the body image experiences of pregnant athletes.

Another drawback of this research is the use of an online survey as the only data collection tool. Online surveys are inexpensive and time-saving, and they can be used to collect a lot of data from a diverse sample, but still, they have their limitations (Gratton & Jones, 2010). Additionally, online surveys might appear to be shallow and lack detail when compared to

qualitative techniques such as interviews, which ensure an in-depth exploration of the respondents' experiences and views (Leavy, 2014).

Interviews could have yielded a deeper understanding of the nuances of body image perceptions among female CrossFit athletes before and during pregnancy. Moreover, interviews were the best way of investigating such unanticipated themes and elaborating on any responses that may be ambiguous in the survey data. The use of qualitative interviews in combination with survey data would have added depth and made the findings of the study more well-rounded regarding body image experiences in this population. Hence, mixed-methods approaches should be considered by further research to take more perspectives and improve the level of analysis. Though interviews or a mixed method could give more detailed insight into body image perceptions of female CrossFit athletes before and during pregnancy, I decided to use a qualitative survey method for a number of reasons. To begin with, the qualitative survey method provides flexibility to busy mothers, who are the target group of this research. CrossFit training, motherhood, and potential professional obligations are a challenging combination, and the respondents are able to participate in the online survey at their own convenience, given their unpredictable schedules. Further, the use of an online medium guarantees accessibility as well as inclusivity, recognizing the varied geographical locations of CrossFit athletes, making participation possible in the absence of the requirement to be physically present. Besides, online surveys create a rather comfortable and non-intrusive environment for the respondents to share their personal experiences, thus, authenticity and diversity are achieved in the study. One of the possible participants has expressed her liking of the online format, showing that flexibility is indeed important as the life of her is unpredictable. This testimony reflects the practical utility of qualitative survey method in the context of target audience needs and desires. In general, although interviews have their own benefits, the qualitative survey approach was found to be the best for this study, offering numerous opportunities to analyze body image experiences of pregnant CrossFit athletes in detail.

Finally, since the study aims for openness, it is important to recognize the limitations that might have originated from the role of me as the researcher and my connections within the CrossFit community. I regularly participate in CrossFit training in one of the gyms being

researched as an active member. Remembering that some of the people could be familiar with the fact that the researcher was also a member of the CrossFit community, it is possible that such acquaintance could also potentially have had a negative impact on their survey answers. Moreover, I have personal connections with some gym members, raising the possibility of response bias. Participants might also have felt hesitant to mention their bad experiences or divergent opinions because of pre-existing relationships (Oliver, 2010). In addition, it has to be remarked that all participants volunteered to take part in the research. The participants were informed that if they found it uncomfortable to be part of the research due to personal connections with me, they were free to opt out. This approach intended to make the participants feel free to make their decisions regarding whether or not to participate in the study, thus reducing the likelihood of personal relationships influencing response bias.

As a result, this study is an important source that brings new information to the body image perception of the female CrossFit athletes' literature, but its limitations should be recognized. Overcoming these limitations in future research attempts will improve the validity and generalizability of findings in this area.

9. Future Research

The study of correlation between the body image expectations of dedicated CrossFit athletes before pregnancy and their real experiences during pregnancy poses a number of areas for the future research. To begin with, longitudinal studies are justified to assess the long-term effects of pregnancy on body image perceptions. Longitudinal research would help reveal the dynamics of changes in body image postpartum and what influences a sustained positive body image or the development of body image problems over time. Additionally, qualitative interviews could complement survey data by offering a deeper understanding of individual experiences and perspectives, particularly regarding the nuances of body image changes during pregnancy. Second, additional studies should investigate the role of cultural and social factors in pregnant athletes' body image perceptions. Knowledge on the ways culture norms, social expectations and social support networks shape body image experiences could guide culturally appropriate interventions to encourage positive body image during pregnancy. Qualitative studies might examine cultural and social conditions which affect body image perceptions in different groups of CrossFit practitioners. Third, exploring the effectiveness of anticipatory guidance and education in preparing athletes for body image changes during pregnancy is a critical future research area. Randomized controlled trials could assess the efficacy of pre-pregnancy counseling programs in promoting the ability of the participants to set realistic expectations and acquire adaptive coping skills that will help them in dealing with the body image concerns in pregnancy. Such interventions could be tailored to address the unique needs and challenges faced by CrossFit athletes during pregnancy. Last but not least, the study has found partner support and spousal dynamics to be significant parts of body image perceptions during pregnancy among the athletes, thus, this area requires further research. In the qualitative studies, pregnant athletes and their partners could be researched on, and this could help to understand how partner involvement affects body image perceptions, coping strategies, and relationship dynamics during pregnancy. Understanding the relational aspects of body image experiences could inform couple-based interventions designed to support pregnant athletes and enhance their well-being.

10. Practical Implications

This study has elicited several implications concerning how to support the body image well-being of pregnant female CrossFit athletes.

First, the determination of adaptive coping strategies which includes seeking social support, indulging in self-care activities and sustaining physical activity emphasized the significance of holistic support systems for expecting athletes. The CrossFit communities and healthcare providers can play an important role in providing individual support and resources to help athletes to manage body image changes during pregnancy. In order to meet these recommendations successfully, specific strategies that would address the specific experiences of the pregnant athletes should be adopted. For example, virtual support groups can be formed for pregnant athletes to link, share experiences and give each other support. Pregnant athletes would benefit from self-care workshops providing them the practical tools of how to manage stress and keep their emotional well-being intact. Creating individual workout programs using CrossFit training principles for athletes at various stages of their pregnancy enables them to remain active in a proper way.

Secondly, the relevance of anticipatory guidance and education in readiness of athletes to the changes of body image during pregnancy creates the necessity for comprehensive preconception counseling interventions. Collaboration between healthcare providers and CrossFit coaches could help in providing evidence-based education and support services to athletes that enable them to set achievable expectations and develop coping strategies for body image concerns during pregnancy. For effective addressing of these recommendations, the particular strategies could be applied. Developing workshops or seminars for women CrossFit athletes, who are planning to get pregnant, will provide them with necessary information and resources, to prepare them for the physical and emotional changes, that come with the pregnancy. Individual counseling sessions with the healthcare providers or trained coaches could provide personalized assistance and direction in managing body image and pregnancy issues. Online resources including information videos, articles, or downloadable guides can be developed to accompany counseling sessions, and also provide support and education, for pregnant athletes who are experiencing body image changes during pregnancy.

In general, the given study stresses the significance of a multidimensional strategy in promoting the body image of pregnant women who are CrossFit athletes which includes social support, cultural competence and anticipatory guidance. CrossFit communities and healthcare providers can support pregnant athletes in having positive body image and general well-being through tailored interventions and resources.

11. Conclusion

The study of the effects of pregnancy on the body image of dedicated female CrossFitters in Denmark has illustrated a complex process of expectation, transition, and resilience. The main research question aimed at finding out how these athletes perceive changes in body image regarding pregnancy, with the aim to understand the nuanced impact of pregnancy on their body image. The main finding of this study is the discrepancy between the expectations and the real experiences of body image during pregnancy among dedicated CrossFit athletes in Denmark. This is a very personal and individual process where the reality is often very different from what one expects. Intended goals such as retaining fitness and a healthy self-image are challenged by the physiological and psychological changes of pregnancy. Nonetheless, in the middle of these adversities, moments of hope, self-discovery, and acceptance can be observed. The involvement of comparison within the CrossFit community and the comparisons to pre-pregnancy self adds another layer to this issue. A number of these athletes are bound to experience increased pressure and low self-esteem while going through these changes brought by pregnancy. However, the supportive community and the opportunities for self-development provide the ways for one's empowerment and self-acceptance. It is possible to conclude, while addressing the main research question, that changes in body image related to pregnancy are seen by dedicated CrossFit athletes through the prism of anticipation, reality, and resilience. The struggle of women to become mothers is not an easy one and shows the importance of further encouragement and help from the CrossFit community. As for the future research suggestions, it will be useful to investigate the changes in body image during pregnancy among dedicated CrossFit athletes in the long term and study the ways to improve the perception of pregnancy in athletes in the CrossFit community. It is also important to make people understand that every athlete has her own story and they should all be valued. Some of the participants may not have had any significant problems with pregnancy body image changes, while others stated that they felt they had lost themselves and began to hate the process. It is crucial to acknowledge and affirm the pregnancy journeys of athletes in order to foster a positive and welcoming environment within the world of CrossFit.

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Appendix

A1 Online Survey Guide

A1.1 Online Survey Questions

Section A: Understanding Your Feelings About Your Body Before Pregnancy

1. How did you feel about your body throughout your athletic career before entering pregnancy?
2. Did you have specific expectations about how your body would change or stay the same during pregnancy? If yes, please provide details.
3. Have you observed differences in body image expectations among fellow pregnant CrossFit athletes, whether personally or through shared spaces like the gym, classes, or social media?
4. What are your thoughts and experiences regarding comparing your body to other CrossFit athletes or individuals within your CrossFit community, especially before pregnancy? Please share any reflections or insights you may have on this topic.
5. How did your involvement in CrossFit impact your overall body image, especially before pregnancy?

Section B: Exploring Feelings About Your Body Throughout Pregnancy Experiences

6. How did your experiences during pregnancy, including physical changes and emotions, influence how you see or feel about your body? Were there particular moments or phases during pregnancy that significantly affected your body image?
7. What strategies or coping mechanisms did you use to manage changes in your body image during pregnancy?
8. If you are aware of any fellow pregnant CrossFit athletes, whether personally, through training at the same gym, attending classes with you, or as role models you follow on social media, did you notice any coping strategies used by them during pregnancy?

Section C: Exploring the Alignment of Expectations vs. Reality

9. How do your expectations align with your actual experiences during pregnancy, and were there any surprises or unexpected aspects of your body image changes compared to what you anticipated?
10. Considering the challenges of pregnancy, were there specific factors that helped you stay positive about your body changes?
11. If you know any fellow pregnant CrossFit athletes, did you notice differences in how they maintained a positive outlook about their body changes during pregnancy?
12. What advice would you give to other pregnant CrossFit athletes who are navigating changes in body image during pregnancy based on your experiences?

A1.2 Consent Form

CrossFit Body Image Experiences Survey: Exploring Pregnancy Perspectives

I am a student pursuing a Master's degree in Sports Sciences at Malmö University, and I am currently undertaking my master thesis project. As part of this academic endeavor, I am conducting research on body image expectations and experiences during pregnancy in CrossFit athletes. Your participation in this confidential online survey is crucial to gaining insights into this unique aspect of maternal health within the CrossFit community.

* Indicates required question

Consent Form *

By clicking 'Yes - I consent to participate in this study' below, you confirm that you have read and understood the provided informed consent information. Additionally, you affirm your voluntary participation in a confidential online survey, exploring body image expectations and experiences during pregnancy in CrossFit athletes.

This survey consists of 12 open-ended questions, and your responses will be treated with strict confidentiality and anonymized for analysis. You have the right to withdraw at any time without facing consequences. If you have any questions, please contact Barbora Boledovicova at bboledovicova8@gmail.com.

Resources for Support In the event that any of the research questions or participation in this survey causes you harm or induces mental stress, please be aware that there are resources available to provide support and assistance. Here are some resources you may find helpful:

Mindapps.dk: A platform offering a variety of healthcare apps designed to address mental health issues such as stress, anxiety, and more. For more information, visit mindapps.dk.

Psykiatrifonden, Mental Health Helpline: This helpline offers free, confidential support via phone and online chat for individuals in Denmark experiencing emotional distress related to issues such as abuse, anxiety, stress, depression, relationships, and more. Contact them at 39 25 25 25 or visit their website: Psykiatrifonden.

Girrtalk Helpline: Dedicated to assisting girls and young women aged 12-24, Girrtalk Helpline aims to strengthen self-esteem and prevent mental vulnerability, harm, and stress. For more information, please visit their website: Girrtalk Helpline.

Note on Questioning Your mental well-being is of utmost importance. If any of the survey questions evoke feelings of harm or stress on a mental level, please feel free to note this in your response to the particular question. Your feedback is valuable, and your comfort is the number 1 priority.

Thank you for contributing to this research.

Yes - I consent to participate in this study

A1.3 Qualitative Survey Invitations

A1.3.1 Instagram Message Invitations

Hey there! 🙌

Are you a CrossFit athlete who's recently been pregnant or given birth? Your experiences could help shape groundbreaking research on body image during pregnancy!

Eligibility:

- 7+ months pregnant or have given birth within the past 2 years
- Engaged in CrossFit at least 3 times a week before pregnancy
- Based in Denmark

How to Participate:

Simply swipe up to access a confidential online survey with 12 open-ended questions. You can choose a time that suits you, and your privacy will be fully respected.

Your insights will make a real difference in understanding the unique challenges faced by CrossFit athletes during pregnancy. Plus, it could lead to greater awareness and support for moms in similar situations!

Participation is 100% voluntary, and you can option out at any time with no consequences.

Interested or have questions? Send me a DM or email me at bboledovicova8@gmail.com.

Thanks for considering this opportunity to share your story!

Warm regards,

Barbora Boledovicova

A1.3.2 Facebook Group Invitations

Attention CrossFit Moms in Denmark!

Are you a CrossFit athlete who's been through pregnancy or childbirth in the last 2 years? If so, your experiences are invaluable for my Sport Sciences master's research study on body image during pregnancy.

Eligibility:

- 7+ months pregnant or have given birth within the past 2 years
- Engaged in CrossFit at least 3 times a week before pregnancy
- Based in Denmark

How to Participate:

Simply click the ***link*** to complete a confidential online survey with 12 open-ended questions. You can choose a time that works best for you, and your privacy will be fully respected.

Your insights will help shed light on the unique challenges faced by CrossFit athletes during pregnancy, potentially improving awareness and understanding in similar situations.

Participation is entirely voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time without consequences.

Interested or have questions? Feel free to reach out to me at bboledovicova8@gmail.com.

Thank you for considering this opportunity to contribute!

Best regards,
Barbora Boledovicova